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THE HARVESTERS:
A Cornish Tragedy in Three
Acts in Verse.

THE PERSONS.

MICHAEL RAVEN.

PETER CORIN.

RICHARD : a boy.

MARY RAVEN.

ANN SAUNDRY.

TAMSON TREMBATH.

JANE ANGOVE.

VECCHAN : the village "innocent."

Villagers, Passengers in the coach, a Sailor.

The Scene takes place at S. Ruan, a village in Cornwall, in the early part of the Nineteenth Century.

Act I.

MICHAEL RAVEN'S cottage at S. Ruan. *Three women, one old and two younger are sitting at the kitchen table, drinking tea. MARY RAVEN stands by the open fireplace, as if she had just set the kettle back on the hearth. ALL are listening to the voice of VECCHAN, which is heard outside, as the Curtain rises, singing:—*

Father cursed and Mother cried
(Ho ! the sickle is in the corn).
It's a year ago to-day that I died
And a year ago I was born.

ANN SAUNDRY.

It's only Vecchan : the poor innocent !
There's always death and birth in what she sings,
And she herself is like a crooked shadow
Bending bright things into dark images
That go before their feet.

TAMSON TREMBATH.

She's in the wind
Always when there's a wind at night.

ANN.

I heard her
Singing her song and calling to the sea
The night my John was drowned.

MARY RAVEN.

I love the child.

She comes and talks to me when I'm alone.
She's wiser than most folk.

JANE ANGOVE.

* She frightens me.
I'm thinking she brings no one any luck.

MARY.

She knows more things about us than we know.

ANN.

It's only life and death and suchlike things
That matter ; all the rest is like the wind,
And comes and goes. I knew my John was dead
Three days before they found him. When I saw
His body on the sand I had no tears left ;
I had wept all the water of my eyes.

MARY.

Ann, it's not we who know these things at all ;
I say let be, and bide the time of them.

ANN.

You never were the one to fret and talk
When fretting was no use, and talk worse help.
I mind me when your mother died, you went
Into the fields a-gleaning from her grave.

TAMSON.

How's the old man ?

MARY.

He is well. He is old.

JANE.

Old folks get questioning, old folks would know
More than there is to tell them ; does he now,
Your father, heed the neighbour's talk at all
Of Peter Corin ?

MARY.

What should father hear,
Or heed ? But father's supper will be cold.

*[She goes over to the fire-place and moves a covered
plate nearer to the fire.]*

TAMSON.

Mary, it's time to speak.

MARY.

I haven't time
To listen : neighbours' talk is neighbours' talk.

TAMSON.

Mary, don't say I ever said a word
Behind your back I wouldn't to your face :
My girl, I only want to be your friend.
You haven't lived, as I have, fifty years
To know what folks can do by telling tales :
You're young, and not afraid of people's tongues ;
Yet evil enough comes by people's tongues.

MARY.

Evil enough : why do you tell me then
What I've no mind to hear ?

TAMSON.

Why, for your good !
What I've been told I tell you, for your good
I tell you : is it nothing to a maid
That harvesters o' nights over their pipes,
Over their ale beside the furrow, say
It's time the banns were called at Ruan Church ?

ANN [*After a pause*].

It's getting dark.

MARY.

I'll light the candle. Well ?

[*She lights a candle on the table.*]

JANE ANGOVE.

The fishermen at Cadgwith ask our men
Who's late enough abed to see o' nights
Peter and Mary on Goonhilly Downs.

MARY.

He has his friends ; but they are not my friends :
If Peter is my friend, what's that to them ?

JANE.

No, no my dear, don't you fly out on us ;
We're none of Peter's friends, only of yours.
Friend do you say ? Of Peter ? that's a word
A woman were best stint to any man,
And most of all to Peter. But some say
He's asked for you in marriage : I'll be bound
They know it best, and there's no harm at all.

MARY.

No man has asked for me in marriage.

JANE.

No ?

Then I'm mistaken, and no harm at all.

MARY.

Why do they talk about us ? by what right ?

No man has any right to take my name

Into his pipe's smoke or his ale-house breath.

ANN [*Getting up and coming to her*].

Don't heed them, Mary ; and let Tamson talk :

There's many things much worse to bear than talk,

You don't know what it is to sit and think,

And hear the wind, when you've a man at sea ;

Nor when there's nothing left to think of.

MARY.

No,

I don't know that.

TAMSON.

Ann's thinking all day long

Of things that won't be mended ; there are things

Thinking might mend.

ANN.

They are not worth the thought :

It's not the real things you think about,

But women's words, fancies of boys and men,

The good name of a maid or of a man.
The good name of a maid or of a man
Is neither life nor death.

[*She goes back to the table.*]

TAMSON.

Talk as you will !

Her grief has made her strange of speech ; but you,
Mary, you'll have to listen, not to us,
But to the louder tones about the lanes,
That are too busy with you. Take my word,
The last to hear what everyone but he
Knows for a rumour, won't take long to know
Rumour from truth ; the first to know, my girl,
Will be your father. Though you'll not heed us,
You will heed him.

MARY.

Here's father.

[*The door opens, and MICHAEL RAVEN comes in and looks at the three women, without looking at MARY.*]

MICHAEL.

A rough night. [*To Mary.*] My supper.

[*He sits down at the table where the knife and fork are laid for him.*]

TAMSON.

Have you been to chapel ?

MICHAEL.

Ay.

TAMSON.

Did you see Nicholas there with Martha ?

MICHAEL.

No.

TAMSON.

None of the neighbours ?

MICHAEL.

I went to seek the Lord,
And not the neighbours.

TAMSON.

You are as bitter, Michael,
As if you had not found him. When you hear
The preacher pray "Forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive them that have trespassed against us,"
How do you join in that ? You'd not forgive
A neighbour's talk against you in his sleep.

MARY.

Here is your supper, father. [*She sets it before him.*]

JANE [*To TAMSON and ANN.*]

Come, it's late ;
We were best moving, Michael.

MICHAEL [*Eating*].

Not for me.

TAMSON.

Mary, my shawl ; come, Ann, we're going. [*Aside to*
MARY.] Mind, 'tis for your good we spoke. Michael,
good-night.

MICHAEL.

Good-night. [*The women slowly get up.*]

JANE [*Opening the door*].

'Tis a high wind.

ANN.

What of the wind ?

There's no wind drowns a dead man in the sea.

[*They all go out. MARY closes the door.*]

MICHAEL.

What did that woman say ?

MARY.

Nothing, father.

MICHAEL [*Putting away his plate*].

Nothing, you say ? Is it all nothing then
These women say to you ? They say to me
Something much more than nothing.

MARY.

Who, father ?

MICHAEL.

I ask you questions : is it a daughter's place

To stand before her father and say nothing,
And ask him to his face : who told you this ?
Who told you that ? Is it a daughter's place
To ask and not to answer ?

MARY.

When have I
Not done my duty, father ? When have I
Not been a daughter to you ?

MICHAEL.

You have done
Your duty as a daughter : now will I do
My duty as a father. Stand you there,
Listen, and speak. Your mother was my wife
Nigh thirty years : and twenty years of youth :
She lived an honest woman, and so died :
And there was not an evil tongue of man
Wagged at her from the cradle to the grave.
God took her, and he left me in her place
You : and have I not done for you all things
A father in a mother's place could do ?
Answer.

MARY.

Yes, father.

MICHAEL.

What I did for you
I did for her sake, and I promised her .
I'd keep you a good girl, and fit for her,
Until the clods of the valley that I'd hoed

Had me and held me under. Honest, eh ?
What's honesty if 'tis not honestly
Chronicled, current in the sight of the world ?
I promised her you should keep pure the name
I gave her and she gave you : now, the name,
What have you done with what was once a pure,
Honourable and uncontaminated name ?
The harvesters toss it among their chaff,
The fishers cast it loose out of their nets,
The women root it like a gaudy weed
Out of their gardens : Mary, answer me,
What have you done with it, the name, the name !

MARY.

O father, you are cruel to me ; stop ;
What have I done, what can I say to you ?
I think that if I told you all the truth
You would not now believe me.

MICHAEL.

May be no,
It's not the truth I ask for : that's with God
Who knows, and when He wills for us to know
We shall know all, in order and due time.
If indeed you are guilty, and have sinned,
Wholly, and broken down the fence of God,
And made His temple an idolator's ;
If indeed you are guilty, I must speak
To another purpose ; but I ask of you
Why you have merely soiled, not cast away,
The reputation of an honest maid ?
You will say nothing ?

MARY.

O father, be kind ;
I have been foolish, and I never thought.

MICHAEL.

Has Peter Corin never thought for you ?

MARY.

No, no, he hasn't thought. How could he know
There were so many listeners at doors,
Tale-bearers, spying eyes about the fields ?

MICHAEL.

You say that they who listened could have heard,
And they who looked have seen, and they who told
Had truth to tell : do you say that ?

MARY.

I say
Nothing ; I deny nothing.

MICHAEL.

So ; that's plain.
You will say nothing if I ask you next
What I have said I would not ask you yet ?
You'll not lie, you'll say nothing ? Then, hear this :
If, as they say, you have sinned, and if your sin
Should find you out, and all men know your sin,
You are my daughter still, I give you bed,
I give you bread, and your child bed and bread ;
But, as God lives, and as he hears me speak,
I will not ever speak to you again ;

Not while I live, not when I die, and not
If we should meet before the throne of God !

[MARY falls on her knees, in terror. MICHAEL rises, takes a candle, and goes upstairs.]

[There is a tap at the door, which she does not hear ; then the door softly opens, and PETER CORIN comes in, closes it behind him, comes up to her, and touches her on the shoulder. She springs up and flings her arms round him.]

MARY.

Peter ! no, no, don't speak ; kiss me ; 'tis you.
Put your arms round me, Peter, hold me fast.

PETER [*Putting her from him*].

Mary, no foolishness : I don't come here
To whistle in the wind outside your door
And hear your father casting Bible texts
About like curses.

MARY.

O, if you had heard
What father said ; you don't know what he said,
But he has burned my heart up with his words.

PETER.

I heard him ranting like a Methody,
Mouthing out God, God, and the throne of God ;
I'll not come here if 'tis a chapel you keep.

MARY.

Peter, Peter, be kind to me !

PETER.

My dear,
I never was unkind to any woman
And you know best if I'm unkind to you.
If I came here to-night : you sent for me,
I don't know why, and yet, in spite of that,
I came for you and nothing else but you.
What do I find ? Your father's Bible texts
And you with white-lipped kisses frightening me !
What is the matter ? Did you want me here ?
Shall I go home again ?

MARY.

Don't leave me now,
I wouldn't dare stay here.

PETER.

Well, then, a kiss.
I want it, and I'll have it. And no words,
Not a half smile, no pretty word at all ?
Is this your welcome ?

MARY.

I will try to smile ;
I have no pretty words ; such as I have,
I have more to speak than you would wish to hear.

PETER.

That's like enough ; what might they be about ?

MARY.

Do you still love me, Peter ?

PETER.

Why, of course.

MARY.

Just as you did ?

PETER.

Just as I always did.

MARY.

Peter, I haven't any other friend.

PETER.

O yes, you have : I met a friend of yours.

MARY.

Who ?

PETER.

Vecchan, singing some old crazy song.
She humped her crooked back at me and ran.
She hates me. All such misbegotten brats
Ought to be drowned, and not be let to live.

MARY.

She loves me, and a body that can love
Is good enough to live. I envy her,
For she can see the other side of things,
Like our dreams can.

PETER.

What's dreaming ? Good enough
For beggars.

MARY.

She is happier than we are.
Her life is all one dream : she lives on alms
And takes them as fine ladies might take gifts ;
She told me that her cottage walls were gold
And that she was the daughter of a King.

PETER.

She fools you with her folly : are you wise ?
The brat's a gallows-child and bides no luck.
I hate her, and I hate her apish brain,
And wits askew like her misshapen back.

MARY.

It isn't right of you to say these things ;
It frightens me to hear you. But don't speak
Of Vecchan if it angers you : be kind :
Father is angry with me : people talk :
You know how people talk about us two.

PETER.

Talk ? let them talk ; what harm is people's talk ?

MARY.

Father believes them.

PETER.

What can he believe ?
There's nothing known, there's nothing to be known.
Keep quiet, my good girl, we're safe enough.

MARY.

No, no, there's nothing safe ; for you and me
There's nothing safe

PETER.

Well, maybe not for me.
You've never thought of what *I* have to lose,
If this should come to light and be the talk ?
Why some day I might want to wed three barns,
Five acres, an old maid thrown in to boot.
I'm quite a likely fellow. .

MARY.

No, not that,
I'll not think that of you against yourself,
Not on your oath.

PETER.

A man must have his joke.
Still, they do talk ; and it does me no good.
Look here, we'll be more careful. Now to-night,
If someone saw me waiting by the door
Until the old man's candle goes upstairs,
Well, they might think, they might say what they
thought,
And what they said might not be good for us.
I'll be more careful.

MARY.

You'll not come at all !
I know ! You've had enough of me, and now
You will be careful. Yes, I know the word :
18

Careful to drop me like a red-hot coal
Out of your clean, honest and open hand !

PETER.

No, Mary, I am not that sort of man.
I don't play fast and loose with what I like.
I take things and I keep things ; if you think
I mean to let you go, come here no more,
Not meet you on the downs, not hold you, no,
As long as I've a mind to ; let you be
The miss again, the go-to-chapel miss ;
You're wrong ! I don't let go of what I've got ;
Now are you mine or not, eh ?

MARY [*Putting her arms around him*].

O, all yours,
There's nothing in me, Peter, that's not yours.

PETER.

Why, that's all right. If there's a rarer girl
From sea to sea in Cornwall, or a girl
That's better loved by any Cornish chap,
Miner or fisherman or harvestman,
Back me against Tregeagle : I'll out-dredge
Dosmare Pool with half his limpet-shell !

MARY.

Don't say these things : they make me feel afraid.
If we're too certain of ourselves, you know
Something is sure to happen. I hardly dare
To think how happy we have been.

PETER.

Why not ?

MARY.

Do you remember how we used to meet
By Vecchan's cottage on the downs ?

PETER.

I do.

MARY.

I always was the first. Night after night
I crept away, and came across the fields,
Until I felt the first wind from the heath.
And I would stand and drink great draughts of wind
Till I was drunken with the honey and salt,
And drunken with the night, and then you came
With all the salt and honey in your lips.

PETER.

They were rare nights.

MARY.

I never thought of you
Without the thought of honey and of salt
And of that first wind blowing from the heath,
A windy place, a no-man's land, a harsh
Unfriendly place where it is good to be.
All other men belong to the tilled fields,
And are as orderly as ranks of corn,
And cattle in the valley ; only you

Belong to the long heath that never ends,
And to the wind blowing to the heath's end.

PETER.

It's only on the heath a man feels free.

MARY.

I used to go alone there, long ago,
That was before we went together ; then,
I walked for miles along the empty road,
Between the gorse and heather, all alone,
And heard the birds singing, and felt as free
As they were : now I couldn't go alone
And feel so free : I couldn't be free now.

PETER.

I wouldn't let you free, Mary, by God !

MARY.

You'll never let me free now, Peter ?

PETER.

No.

MARY.

Not even if—

PETER.

What do you mean by if ?

MARY.

If people talked against me ; if they came

To cast your name into my teeth, and I
Stood shamed, and father cast me off from him ;
If what is secret now between us two
The children talked about us in the roads ;
If——

PETER.

All your ifs are less then one round nought ;
There's nothing except one thing left to fear ;
And that, well, we'll know that before they do.

MARY.

If there were reason for the people's talk ?

PETER.

How could there be a reason for their talk ?

MARY.

I do not say there is, but if there were ?

PETER.

Out with the truth, Mary, out with the truth !

MARY.

Peter, you'll not be angry if I speak ?

PETER.

I want to know the truth, only the truth.

MARY.

O God, it's true.

PETER.

If this is some damned lie !

MARY.

O, it's no lie, it's nothing but the truth.

PETER.

Fool !

MARY.

No, don't, Peter, don't ! you'll kill me.

PETER.

I.

It's after all some trick, some trap of yours—

MARY.

It's true, Peter, as true as misery,
And wretched as the misery of truth.

PETER.

Now I know how the pleasure of a man
Ends ; I am caught, and shamed, and fooled : for
what ?
A woman, a woman, to the end of time !

MARY.

Have you no pity ? won't you think of me,
Peter, and all the suffering and the shame,
And all because I loved you ? Father says
He'll never speak a word to me again :
You'll not forsake me, Peter, and because

I loved you more than any woman should ?
Say that you love me, Peter, just the same !

PETER.
What's done is done.

MARY.
Peter !

PETER.
They knew, it seems ;
I didn't know ; you never told me. Eh,
Why did you never tell me ? Stand and speak !

MARY.
What do you mean ?

PETER.
You don't know what I mean ?
How do I know that what you mean means me ?

MARY.
Peter !

PETER.
Well ?

MARY.
Do you want an answer ?

PETER.
No.

MARY.

If you would have an answer you must wait
Till God makes me another kind of woman
And you the man I took you for till now.

PETER.

Come, I meant nothing. Put it out of mind.
What's done is done, and there's no more to say.

MARY.

What shall we do? what's left for us to do?

PETER.

What should I do? what could I do, my lass?
There's nothing to be done: bide still and wait.

MARY.

You'll let me wait until I come to shame.
I thought my father loved me: now I need
The help of love, he casts me from his heart.
He's kinder than you are.

PETER.

There's time enough.

MARY.

You speak to me as if you hate me now,
And I repent that I have trusted you

With all my shame : you hate me for my shame,
You won't be honest with me any more.

PETER.

Mary, we've only done like other folks ;
They don't get found out : we're to be found out.
Whose fault is that ? I say it isn't fair.
There's something in the world that isn't fair.

MARY.

O Peter, won't you put wrong things to rights
And mend the world ? If every man did that,
We women would be out of the world's harm.

PETER.

What can I mend ? I didn't make the world,
It's made all of a piece, it's made for them
That go to chapel and sleep sound o' nights,
It's not made for such women and such men
As you and I are : as for mending it,
I haven't any mind to : let it go.

MARY.

But, Peter, it won't let us live our lives ;
It comes between us and the face of the sun ;
We cannot fight against things as they are.

PETER.

Did I not tell you ? Things are as they are ;
We have to make the best of them. Now come ;
Don't think about this thing that can't be helped.
There's time enough. We'll talk of it again.

MARY.

There's nothing now but this to think about,
And what's the good of talking ?

PETER.

Little use.

No sort of use to-night.

[*He gets up as if to go.*]

MARY.

You're going ?

PETER.

Ay.

MARY.

Now you don't want to kiss me.

PETER [*Seizing her in his arms*].

But I do,

But I will, Mary, till come never-mass.

MARY.

Now let me go.

PETER.

And don't you dream of it.

And, Mary, don't you say a word of this.

MARY.

What should I say to anyone but you ?

The children will all know it soon enough.

PETER.

Bide still and wait, my lass.

[He kisses her, and goes out. She stands motionless for a moment, then goes to the fire, takes a twist of paper, and lights a candle. She takes up the candle and goes slowly across the room towards the stairs.]

MARY *[With a bitter laugh]*.

Bide still and wait !

THE CURTAIN.

Act II.

The harvest field in August. MICHAEL RAVEN is lying asleep under a hayrick ; TAMSON, ANN, and JANE stand near him looking down on him, holding sickles in their hands.

TAMSON.

He is asleep ; we'll wait until he wakes ;
He has been sharpening sickles all the day :
An old man's labour, but too much for him.

ANN.

How old he looks.

JANE.

You'd hardly say 'twas he,
The Michael Raven of a year ago.

ANN.

True, trouble packs an old man's back with years,
Twice his own bundle.

TAMSON.

We will let him sleep
Where he has made a bed out of the shade.
Let us sit down : this shade is comfortable,
And such a harvest sun to dry the corn,
And soak to the very marrow of our bones
I have not known these thirty or more years.

ANN.

Well, well, my back is almost broken in two

With gathering up the corn into my arms
And stooping down with every sickle-stroke.

JANE.

It's good to rest ; there's none of the twelve hours
That hasn't got its corner on the clock
Marked out for resting.

ANN.

Mary never came.

JANE.

Better she didn't : she's too near her time.
It's cruel for a woman when she needs
To lie abed, whether she's rich or poor,
To have to crawl about a harvest field,
Even to glean a handful.

TAMSON.

She will come,
I am sure of it, for she came yesterday,
Though she was shaking like a blade of grass
That stands as cold as water in the sun.

ANN.

Look at her father. How can he sleep there
As quiet as a child ? I saw him smile,
As if he dreamed : how can he sleep, I say,
When Mary hasn't where to lay her head ?

TAMSON.

You are unjust : you never can be just :

He has been cruel to her, that is true,
Not heartless, for he gives her bed and board.

ANN.

Not heartless? well, he gave her bed and board
(And little praise it's like to be to him)
Until three nights ago ; but these three nights—

JANE.

Hush, he is waking !

TAMSON.

No, he moved in sleep.

ANN.

These three night past she's had no bed, or had
The heather for a bed : cold charity :
Night and the wind upon Goonhilly Downs !
And if her father thrust her out of doors,
Or if the girl was crazed and couldn't sleep,
I don't well know, and see small difference.
That man would be as righteous as God is :
Look you what comes to men of righteousness !

TAMSON.

You're hard upon him.

ANN.

He was hard on her.
What is a father for, if not to help

His children when they need him, and to love
His children when they're far beyond his help ?
It is so soon they get beyond his love,
And are no more than bodies that won't stir
For any father ; then a father knows
That nothing matters except life and death ;
Then he learns pity, when it is too late
To pity but himself.

TAMSON.

He was too hard,
For we are all but sinners : a hard man :
But it was not for nothing, as we thought ;
He had good cause. Who thought, when you and I
Bade Mary be more careful of her name,
That all the care was over ?

JANE.

Ay, who thought ?

ANN.

Why, I did. There are women who step in
Knee-deep into the slough, and then step back
A little fouled, and wash their feet of it,
And go their way. But she's not one of such.
If Mary gave her heart to any man
She would keep nothing over ; and for that,
She is the cleaner and the honester,
And liker to her father. He and she,
Father and daughter, have an equal will :
His will not bend and hers can only break.

JANE.

He has not spoken to her, so they say,
Since he knew all.

TAMSON.

Not a word, not one word.
No wonder the poor girl is well-nigh crazed,
To sit by the same fire, and to eat food
At the same table, and not speak, and not
Be answered if you speak.

ANN.

They die of silence,
He on this side, she on that side of the fire ;
And as she droops and withers he grows old.

JANE.

Will nothing bend his will ?

ANN.

Nothing on earth ;
Because he takes it for the will of God.
I passed outside the window one dark night,
And heard, as I thought, voices, and looked in ;
And she was kneeling on the kitchen floor,
And lifting up her hands and bowing down
Her proud white face upon them ; and I heard
Such a poor pitiful and loving prayer
For pity, that I could not listen to it.

JANE.

Did not he listen ?

ANN.

Turned his head, and sat,
Not moving, like a thing frozen to stone ;
But as I looked into his eyes and saw
All that was in them, he not knowing it,
They seemed to flicker like a flame that burns
Quite out to ashes.

JANE.

There is Peter Corin ;
Coming this way.

[PETER CORIN, carrying a sickle in his hand, crosses the cornfield and, seeing the women, stops, takes out his pipe, and is going to speak, when he catches sight of MICHAEL RAVEN lying asleep ; he shrugs his shoulders, puts his pipe in his mouth again, and passes on. Presently he is seen at work at the other end of the field, and remains there throughout the next part of the scene.]

ANN.

Let sleeping dogs lie, eh ?
It isn't Peter Corin who would come
Nearer to Michael Raven in his sleep
Than half the field's length.

TAMSON.

A man fears a man
When he has robbed him ; but *he* need not tear.

ANN.

But he has cause to fear him.

TAMSON.

What of that ?

It is himself, and his own flesh and blood,
That Michael can't forgive ; as for the man
Who wronged him, he's a sinner, and not saved ;
But Michael's saved, and Mary, if she sins,
Sins doubly, having once been saved from sin.

ANN.

Is that religion ?

TAMSON.

No, it's vanity
Of the spirit, pride of virtue, self itself,
Under a garment of humility.
Only, I pity Michael more than her
That he's unfathered, for the father in him
Dies with worse agonies.

JANE.

Hush ! he is waking up.

[MICHAEL *sits up and looks round him.*]

MICHAEL.

Where are your sickles ?

TAMSON.

Here. You have been asleep.
We were tired too, and waited till you woke.

MICHAEL [*Getting up*].

Give me the sickles ; I will sharpen them.
[*He begins to sharpen them.*]

I have done wrong to sleep away my time.
I'm a hired servant, I am hired to work,
Not sleep.

ANN:

You will work better if you rest.
Rest awhile longer, till the heavy heat
Of the full middle of the day is past.

MICHAEL.

I have my work to do. You can be idle.
I do not judge you, though you waste the hours
In sitting idly while I lie asleep :
You should have wakened me to do my work.
[RICHARD, a boy, comes up with a sickle.]

RICHARD.

Here, Master Raven, Peter Corin says
His sickle will not cut.

MICHAEL.

Give it to me.
It wants a better edge. I'll sharpen it.
[He puts it aown.]

RICHARD.

You'll do it now though, Peter Corin says ?

MICHAEL [*laying down the other sickle, and taking it up*].
Yes, I will do it now. This one can wait.

TAMSON.

You call us idle : have you worked like us,
Stooping above the corn and cutting it
In armfuls for the binders, and with all
The sun's weight like a haystack on our backs ?

MICHAEL.

My business is to sharpen this good steel
So that the sickles may be sharp to cut
The corn before the night comes, or the rain.
If I should sleep now, and not sharpen them,
Or leave a broken edge upon the blade,
There would be less good bread in ovens, less
Women and children fed : see how things hang
Upon an old man's shoulders ! if I leave
One sickle dull, one duty not well done,
The proper course of things may go to wrong,
One of God's ordinances may fail !

ANN.

Who knows ?
I'd not be looking out so far for them,
But nearer home, Michael.

MICHAEL.

What's to be done
Is nearest home : this is my work : do yours.

TAMSON.

Well, well.

MICHAEL [*To* RICHARD].

Here is your sickle : I have put
A better edge upon it : it will serve
Until it is too dark to see the corn.

[RICHARD takes the sickle back to PETER CORIN.]

TAMSON.

Give us our sickles.

[*They get up and move a few steps away.*]

MICHAEL.

Yours is nearly done.

ANN [*Aside*].

Look, there is Mary : past that arish-mow.

JANE [*Aside*].

She sees us : not her father.

ANN [*Aside*].

Let her come.

MICHAEL.

Your sickle has a duller edge than that.
It will not come so sharp.

TAMSON [*Aside*].

She is past work.

[MARY comes in, dragging herself along painfully. She
only sees the women.]

MARY.

*I have come without a sickle
Because I am too weak to reap the corn ;
What can I do to help you ?*

ANN.

Come with us.

MICHAEL [*To TAMSON*].

Here is your sickle. These are not so dull.
But I will bring them to you.

*[MARY, hearing his voice, turns, and stands looking at
him without a word, while he goes on with his work,
not lifting his eyes.]*

TAMSON.

Come with us.

MARY.

O no, not now : leave me alone with him.
I will speak to him, and I will come to you.

JANE.

Best come with us.

TAMSON.

You see she will not come.

ANN.

Leave her alone : her silence will plead now
If ever any words will.

*[They go out. MARY speaks, slowly, with a pause
between each section. MICHAEL goes on with his work,
not lifting his eyes.]*

VECCHAN.

*I have been looking for you in all the fields ;
I had to find you. Why are you crying ? It is I
Who ought to be crying, and, listen ! because of you
I am very very happy. The king my father
Has taken away my crown of ruby and gold,
Because I will marry no man ; but have you forgot
That this is your wedding-day ? Do you hear the bells ?
I have brought you a crown of corn and poppies, see,
But you are to say that they are ruby and gold ;
And we'll go to church in the morning.
Come !* [She tries to raise her.]

MARY.

No, child,
I am too tired ; and I shall not be happy
Any more now.

VECCHAN.

That's strange ; but take it, take it.
[She thrusts the garland into her hands.]
You'll not be tired soon ; when you are married and
have children
You can lie abed in the morning, and say your prayers
without kneeling.

MARY [*Raising herself*].

Why have you brought me poppies ? Did you guess
How much I must forget now ?

VECCHAN.

O no, O no,

*The poppies are for rubies, and they're for blood,
And blood is red, and red is the king's colour.
But you're not listening.*

MARY.

Yes, I am listening.

VECCHAN.

No one but you must know, till afterwards.
Now listen; shall I tell you some of the wedding-
guests?

MARY.

Yes, tell me.

VECCHAN [*Counting on her fingers*].

There is our grandmother the Earth,
And she is hooded with a great green bonnet of leaves,
And wears a green robe; and Our Lady the sea,
Who has come with the skipping young waves in her
train

And she wears blue; and this, you cannot well see
For the cloak of clouds he is wrapped in, is the Wind;
And some of our poor relations, the kind beasts,
Have come too. But do you want to know the
presents?

MARY.

Yes, tell me.

VECCHAN.

No, I'll not tell you: wait and see.

The sexton is bringing them in a big black bag,
And he has a spade on his shoulder.

[*Sings.*]

Who'll dig the grave for my true love ?

My true love was he.

My new love, my new love, my new love,

My new love and me.

But the morning's for burying, and the noon to wed
in

And at night we are all born ; and then begins life
everlasting.

MARY.

Do you love me, Vecchan ?

VECCHAN.

O yes, dearly, dearly,

And so does the king's son.

There's many against the match, but the king is for it ;
Never fear but you shall be brought to bed of three
princes.

[*Sings.*]

Three pearls in the king's crown :

The king came riding into town

On Michaelmas day in the morning.

Turn the pennies in your pocket, for at the turn of the
moon

We shall all be changed.

MARY.

Will you change too, and leave me ?

VECCHAN.

Only if the king my father calls me to his court,
But I wouldn't go unless you could come with me too.
They say the old king is evil and afraid of God,
But I know it is not so, for he goes out in the sunlight,
And I can prove it to you with any two wisps of straw.

Mary.

Shall I come with you, Vecchan ?

VECCHAN.

No, not now,
You can join us, though, after the funeral :
That will be in the other world : I have said my
prayers.

But Death is a reaper, and we are corn for his sickle.

[*Sings.*]

Ho ! the sickle is in the corn.

[*She catches sight of PETER CORIN, who comes forward
with his sickle in his hand.*]

But here comes the devil reaping : save me, save me !

[*She runs away. PETER CORIN comes forward, lays
his sickle on the ground, and stands in front of MARY.*]

PETER.

Is the mad wench gone ?

MARY.

* You made her.

PETER.

I ?

MARY.

By coming.

PETER.

Is that the only greeting that I get ?

MARY.

I came to seek you

PETER.

Yes, and found your father,
And got no good by it. Why have you been strange,
Why have you hid yourself among the folk ?
How long is it since I had a word with you ?

MARY.

I came to speak with you ; but now I think
All speaking must be useless. I have spoken,
But now, with one who loved me more than you,
My father ; I have prayed as one prays God,
And he was silent as God also is.
Why should I speak with you ? what should we say
That's not been said already ? There's nothing more
To talk of for a while.

PETER.

Yes, many things.
Why have you hid yourself away from me ?
Why must I be a stranger all at once ?
What does this mean ?

MARY.

What do you want of me ?

PETER.

Tell me one thing, Mary: where did you sleep
These last three nights?

MARY.

Upon the heath.

PETER.

For choice?

MARY.

For choice.

PETER.

He didn't turn you out of doors?

MARY.

I have but to make my bed and lay my plate.

PETER.

You will not?

MARY.

No, I will not.

PETER.

In God's name,
Why, at all times, and mostly at this time?

MARY.

At this time chiefly.

PETER.
You are mad.

MARY.
Maybe ;
But I still keep my memory.

PETER.
What is this ?

MARY.
I must be free or die.

PETER.
Are you not free ?

MARY.
Free ? when I must be silent, catch my breath,
Pen up my sighs, quench my tears, teach those thoughts
That would cry loud and fly far, as with wings,
To shut themselves in prison.

PETER.
Better bide
Under a roof, although you call the roof
A prison.

MARY.
Do you judge for me ?

PETER.
Why not ?

MARY.

Because I have gone clean out of your hands,
And now I do not think a thought of yours
Or heed you when you bid me.

PETER.

Now that's strange,
I thought I knew you, and I thought you knew
Me. But you do not know me, it would seem.

MARY.

You have been teaching me.

PETER.

You'll say perhaps,
Because you are sick and angry—

MARY.

I will say ?

PETER.

You'll say you never loved me.

MARY.

Shall I say it ?

How much I loved you, why should I say now
When nothing matters ? you yourself said once
Things kinder than you thought : yet, when you said
them,
I shut the eyes up of my own belief
That they should see no falsehood.

PETER.

What was false ?

MARY.

Your kisses were all changlings.

PETER.

No, not that.

And that you know ; you know as well as I.
I cared for you, I made you care for me ;
You've not forgotten, nor yet I ; you know
How little breath I wasted upon wind,
But when I said " Mary, I'll come to-night,"
Or " Meet me here to-morrow," did I come ?
Tell me, now, did I meet you ?

MARY.

Yes, you came.

PETER.

And is that nothing ? When you talk of love
I don't mean like a sandpiper in spring,
With songs and antics : I mean more than that
I cared for you, as a man can ; by God,
I never left you and I never would
If you would let me.

MARY.

My father cast me off ;
You do not cast me off. O no, your greed
Clutches with all its fingers at the crumbs
They scattered from the table.

PETER.

What does this mean ?
Have you forgotten to be friends with me ?

MARY.

Yes, clean forgotten. What I have to do
Leaves no room over for remembering.
And I should have forgotten that you were,
As one forgets a bad dream ; but I wake,
And this that moves in me remembers you.

PETER.

Mary, be friends with me again ; I say
You must.

MARY.

Ay, let's be merry. We shall have
The strangest weeping comedy.

PETER.

You choose
To wring my words awry out of my mouth,
But this is spoken honest.

MARY.

Honest ? No !
How long since have you parted ? honesty
Will not remember you. O no, no, no,
I am not here to rail or wrangle with you.
Leave me alone : if you have any pity,
Leave me.

PETER.

I will not leave you. Do you hear ?
I am your master.

MARY.

You ? my master ? no.
I have another master than you are,
Nearer to me than you were ever, made
Out of my love that I might hate you for it.

PETER.

And yet I am your master and your child's.

MARY.

Why do you say that ? what is it you mean ?
O no, you don't mean anything.

PETER.

I mean
More than I say.

MARY [*Rising and clinging to him*].

No, no, don't say these things
Because you pity me a little, no,
Or I shall hate you ; for you never speak
The whole truth out ; and it will do no good.

PETER.

Mary, don't think I mean to give you up :
You knew I never meant to give you up.
Why have you been so strange to me ?

MARY.

• Because

I am to be the mother of your child.

PETER.

But you don't hate me ?

MARY.

Peter, I am now

Disowned for it, dishonoured, pointed at
By children's fingers, whipped by women's tongues ;
I was the proudest girl in Ruan : now
The meanest can look down on me. And for this
I have hated you ; not for my sake ; because
I was to be the mother of a son
Who should be shamed in me his mother. Now,
You'll do me right at last !

PETER.

Why, what is this ?

MARY.

I never dared to speak to you, I thought
You had tired of me, I said it in my heart
Each day before I saw you and each night
After I'd seen you, but I never dared
To say it to your face. Only I prayed
Sometimes, between my father's silences,
And then the hope was stronger. You are sure
You want me still, and you could love me still ?

PETER.

Of course I want you : are you mad ? you think

I'd give you up to any other man
While I can swing a sickle ? You have been strange
And angry with me. I knew how to wait.
We'll have good times again. That you should think
I'd ever let you go !

MARY.

You'll not ? You'll not ?

PETER.

I'll never let you go.

MARY.

I am too glad.

What is it that keeps turning in my head ?
I am giddy, but with joy : O dreadful joy !
But you're not lying to me ? you mean truth ?
You'll marry me ?

PETER.

I'll—I'll be good to you.

MARY.

You'll make me honest before all the world ?
You'll marry me in church ?

PETER.

Who talked of church ?
We didn't need the church six months ago.

MARY.

You'll marry me ?

PETER.

• No, I'll not *marry* you !

[MARY recoils from him, and the voice of VECCHAN is heard singing "Ho ! the sickle is in the corn !"]

But, as God lives,—

[He steps towards her, holding out his arms.]

MARY.

Does God live ?

[She snatches up PETER'S sickle and stabs him with it, he falls without a word. As she stands, rigid, and holding the sickle in her hand, VECCHAN comes in, goes up to her, and touches her on the arm.]

VECCHAN.

Put down the sickle, for the harvest is all in.

THE CURTAIN.

Act III.

[*The Market-place in S. Ruan. MICHAEL RAVEN is sitting on a bench against a wall; RICHARD, a boy of ten, stands before him.*]

RICHARD.

What's murder, Michael ? is it killing folk ?

MICHAEL.

Ay, lad.

RICHARD.

And are folk killed for killing them ?

MICHAEL.

That's as the law will have it.

RICHARD.

What's the law ?

MICHAEL.

The law is what makes rules of right and wrong,
What you may do and what you may not do,
And punishes you if you do the wrong.

RICHARD.

What does the law do if you do the right ?

MICHAEL.

Nothing.

RICHARD.

But is it right to kill a man
Because he killed another ?

MICHAEL.

It may be.

RICHARD.

Is the law always right ?

MICHAEL.

It's always law ;
Whatever the law says, has to be done.

RICHARD.

Who made the law ? did God ?

MICHAEL.

Man made the law.

RICHARD.

Does God know more than those that made the law ?

MICHAEL.

Ay.

RICHARD.

Then why doesn't God speak out ?

MICHAEL.

That's it ;
Why doesn't God speak out and save his truth ?

What does the law know of the truth of God ?
These hands have blood upon them, and look clean,
Not in God's sight, but in the sight of the law ;
And even her most awful hands, that struck
Where I had but aided guilt innocently,
Her hands that are to bear upon their palms
Always the weight of a soul unprepared
And unforgiven, that now lives in hell,
They also are called clean.

RICHARD.
What do you say,
Michael ?

MICHAEL.
These hands, these hands ! What did I say ?

RICHARD.
Tell me, I want to know, and you must know,
Is Mary free ?

MICHAEL.
She's coming back to-day.

RICHARD.
They put her into prison ?

MICHAEL.
She was tried.

RICHARD.
But if she did kill Peter Corin, why
Didn't the law kill her ?

MICHAEL.

I have asked that.

RICHARD.

Was it the baby ? did he save her life ?

MICHAEL.

Yes, I suppose so ; she was mad, they said ;
They said she didn't know.

RICHARD.

Then is she mad ?

MICHAEL.

No, she's not mad : no madder than I am.

RICHARD.

Well, you are queer, you know.

MICHAEL.

You think so, too ?

Why do you think so ?

RICHARD.

You are always talking
To yourself, and when you talk to me you say
Things I don't understand. And then your hands
Are always shaking, and your head shakes, too.

MICHAEL.

I am old, I am old ; how old I am
Only my sorrow knows.

RICHARD.

Why do you look
At me so sadly? When will Mary come?

MICHAEL.

She will come soon enough. My punishment
Cannot be long in coming.

RICHARD.

I'll go and see
If I can see the coach.

*[A neighbour crosses the square, and stops by MICHAEL,
while RICHARD runs away and looks down the road.]*

NEIGHBOUR.

Good evening, Michael.
Might you be waiting for the coach?

MICHAEL.

I am.
Why do you want to know?

NEIGHBOUR.

I want to know
Nothing but if 'tis in from Helston yet?

MICHAEL.

No, it is not.

NEIGHBOUR.

Then I'll have time, I think,
To go up home-along.

[He goes on. RICHARD runs back.]

RICHARD.

It isn't coming.

MICHAEL.

It will come soon enough. Things come, things come,
We cannot hinder them. Richard, my boy,
Tell me, now tell the truth, was it not you
That brought me Peter's sickle in the field ?

RICHARD.

I did. I said to you : Peter Corin says
Please, Michael, will you sharp his sickle up ?
And you said : I will put an edge upon it
So that it cuts until the sun goes down.

MICHAEL.

And then you took it back to him ?

RICHARD.

I did.

And Peter Corin drew his finger down
The edge o' it, and said : Well sharpened, old man !

MICHAEL.

You only carried death between your hands,
But I gave death help, made death sure with mine.
Why did not God wither up these old hands
Sooner ? they shake with age, yet these old hands
Are guilty.

RICHARD.

Why do you speak as if you spoke
To someone ? there is no one here but me.

MICHAEL.

No, no, it was the ordinance of God,
He set it like a trap to snare my soul ;
And I am caught, and the teeth meet in me.
I am to see this stain upon my soul
That I may know myself for what I am
And taste God's mercy in his punishment.
She must come back to me with all her sin,
The murderess and the adulteress
Must sit beside me, sleep under my roof ;
She must bring blood across my threshold ; God
Has made my seed a wasting and a plague.
And I must not be pardoned. Though I sinned
I must not pardon. I have sworn an oath,
And I must keep it : I must set these hands,
Though they are shaking, I must build up again
With these old hands silence like a strong wall.

RICHARD.

Michael, what is adulteress ?

MICHAEL.

A word
Out of the Bible.

RICHARD.

Is that all ? I thought
You spoke of Mary : she's a murderess,
Isn't she ?

MICHAEL.

This also is my punishment.

[*Villagers begin to come in, and stand about as if waiting.* RICHARD goes up to them.]

VILLAGER.

The coach is late.

SECOND VILLAGER.

The coach is always late.

FIRST VILLAGER.

There are too many alehouses to pass.

SECOND VILLAGER.

Too many Cornish hills : it's cruel work,
For any pair of horses on our roads.

SAILOR [*With a bundle*].

You think so ? well, you haven't been in Spain.

THIRD VILLAGER.

I haven't : what of Spain ?

SAILOR.

They say in Spain
Beasts are not Christians, and they haven't souls :
Bodies they have though, and they martyr them
Worse than they martyred Christians.

THIRD VILLAGER.

Is that so ?

SAILOR.

Horses ? they're not. Skinfuls of rattling bones,
Like drums for devils to beat tunes upon.
Don't pity the fat nags that pull your coach.

FIRST VILLAGER.

You've travelled, sir.

SAILOR.

Not yet to London, sir.
Many a time I've passed the mouth of Thames,
But never nearer.

[ANN, TAMSON and JANE come in, and stand together
at the opposite side from MICHAEL.]

TAMSON.

Look, there's Michael !

JANE.

Where ?

TAMSON.

He's sitting on the bench against the wall.
His eyes are on the ground : he does not see us.

JANE.

He will not look at us.

TAMSON.

It's hard on Michael.
A just hard man, a God-abiding man,
That's been twice chastened for his daughter's sins.
What will he do ? how can he let her come
Under his roof, she being what she is ?

ANN. .
Where should she go ?

TAMSON.
Where is there she can go ?

JANE.
It's hard on Mary. She should not come back.
It's a bold thing of Mary to come back.
But are you sure that she will come to-day ?

ANN.
There has been word from Bodmin, from the gaol.
Somehow, by now, I think all Ruan knows :
Look at our folk ; there's a strange sailor too ;
Why should they flock to see a girl come home,
As if she were a waxwork in a show ?

TAMSON.
They're not all come for Mary. If they were ?
I'm not come here to pry upon her, Ann ;
I'll go before she comes. But, do you think
Michael will take back and break his oath ?

ANN.
He will not break his oath : he'll take her back.
He's waiting for her there, and he will wait
Until she comes ; but he'll not speak to her,
Nor then nor never. I'm to bring her home,
Instead of him, and he has put the words
Into my mouth he will not say to her :
He told me word for word ; I'm not to say
A syllable beyond, a syllable less,

Not to show any kindness in the words,
Not to say less than the bare truth of them.

TAMSON.

She's got a home then : well, I'm glad of it ;
She'll need it, and what has she now to tell
But bitter tears, and what belongs to God ?
She'll never want to lift her voice again
When she has seen her father.

ANN.

Hush, he'll hear.
He's not so old and not so broken down
He'll let himself be pitied.

JANE.

Do you think
That she is free now, just as we folk are ?
She killed the man : we saw him lying dead
And her with the red sickle : is it true
They let her off with nothing ?

TAMSON.

Well, it's true,
And if that's law at Bodmin, it's not law
Out of the Bible.

ANN.

It is just and right,
As well as law. They said the girl was mad,
And the girl was mad, for that minute ; yes,
And for those days that followed, black with pain

And darkness without memory, when she lay
And felt a seven months' child struggle and run
Out of the grave and prison of its life
Into the grave. The mother in her blood
Turned all her blood to folly and blind rage ;
And when she struck, it was the little hands
That groped about her heart and made her strike.

JANE.
She killed the man.

ANN.
I know she killed the man.
Why do you judge her harder than the law ?
What's madness, if that is not madness ? Why,
Are you afraid of her ?

JANE.
No, I'm not afraid.

ANN.
But you'll not go to her, and take her hand,
When she comes back to us from Bodmin gaol ?
She'll seem, not the same Mary as she was,
But some new wicked stranger ?

TAMSON.
As she is.

ANN.
I say there is no difference ; as she was
So she is still, and ever will be so.
It's only that some chasm has crumbled down

Between her old life and this new scarred life.
Do you not see that nothing ever changes
Because we change our name for it? The same
Mary with the same silent thinking face,
Paler perhaps, and tighter at the lips
Will step out presently and come to us,
As if the sickle in her hands had whitened
Only upon the patient necks of corn.

TAMSON.

The Bible says: "They that take up the sword
Shall perish by the sword"; the law says no.
The law pities: that's well and good; but here,
Where Peter Corin's mother can't forgive,
Is she to be forgiven?

ANN.

Tamson, if I
Who scarcely can set bite to sup for those
My John left fatherless, had room at home
And bread upon the shelf, I wouldn't say
One word the old man taught me, but I'd say,
"Mary, poor soul, there's room for you at home,
Come home and share the children's bread with them
Only, I must not, for there's none to spare.

TAMSON.

Thank God for it. Not if I'd all the barns
In Ruan parish should she darken door
Or share the bread-crumbs of a child of mine.

JANE.

It's not to be expected, Tamson.

ANN.

Go.

Here's Richard running up the Helston road :
He sees the coach : she's coming. I stay here,
Because I must : God help us all ! But go.

[TAMSON and JANE go out.]

SAILOR [To VILLAGERS].

Who's that you say ? the girl who killed the man
Last year at harvest ? Coming by the coach ?
Why, I'm in luck to see her. Let's sit down
By that old man who looks as drugged asleep
As any moth by day, and talk of it.

FIRST VILLAGER.

He is her father.

SAILOR.

The Lord forgive my tongue !

RICHARD [Running up].

It's coming, it's coming. [To MICHAEL.] Michael, they
are here.

[The coach drives up, stops, and the passengers begin to get out, and the luggage to be taken down from the top. Ladders are brought, and the horses unharnessed, and led away. Some of the villagers go up to their friends who have got out, and go away together. Others stand as if waiting. MARY is the last to get out. Many stare at her but none speak.]

SECOND VILLAGER.
How late you are !

FIRST PASSENGER [*A girl*].
Where's mother ?

SECOND VILLAGER.
Safe at home.
She sent me down to meet you.

SECOND PASSENGER [*A woman*].
I've not brought
A thing of all the things you sent me for.

THIRD PASSENGER [*A young woman*].
She's there.

THIRD VILLAGER.
Who, Mary ? Where is she ?

THIRD PASSENGER.
She took
The inside corner. No one spoke to her,
Of course. She never spoke. She shouldn't come
With decent folk as if she had the right.

SAILOR.
Is that the girl ?

FIRST VILLAGER.
Yes, she that's getting out
The last of all. She waited till the last.
I doubt they wouldn't speak to her.

SAILOR.

Poor lass !
She's sick with journeying.

FIRST VILLAGER.

Or with shame.

SAILOR.

Not shame.
Her eyes see nothing ; if they did, I think
They would judge some of us. Where is her child ?

FIRST VILLAGER.

The child was born in gaol, and died in gaol.
It was born dead.

SAILOR.

And yet that woman lives !
I never heard the like of it, or saw
The like of that pale woman with those eyes.
It's not for us to judge her, but to go
Out of the sight and judgment of her eyes.

[He goes out, followed by others. The people gradually go in different directions. MARY stands, holding a bundle, and looking about her. She sees her father ; they look straight at one another without speaking.]

MARY.

Father !

[She moves a step towards him. ANN goes up to MARY and touches her on the arm. MARY turns.]

You I was sure of, Ann. But look !
Father is here.

ANN.
Wait, Mary.

MARY.
No, No !

ANN.
Wait.

MARY.
What do you mean ?

ANN.
He will not speak to you.
Don't go to him.

MARY.
How we forget things, Ann,
All of a sudden, things we know so well.
A moment, and I had forgotten everything
But that he was my father and I his child.
Now I remember. Ann, I am so tired.
The journey's over. Why have I come back ?

ANN.
You have come back for always. You are home.

MARY.
Why is he here ?

ANN.
It is for you he's here ;
Only, you know, he must not speak to you.

He has told me what to say. Tell her, he said
(These were his very words) tell her, he said,
That bed and board is hers, and always shall be,
And that his oath is his, and always shall be,
And that he swore he'd never speak to you
And never will until God takes his soul ;
For which he prays the Almighty day by day,
As for his daily bread.

MARY.

I have prayed that.
That prayer is never answered. I am here.

ANN.

Those were the words he said.

MARY.

Why am I here ?
The prison was a better home to me.

ANN.

Never say that.

MARY.

It was a better home.
It shut out shame, it shut out all the world.
Why did they give me freedom, to come here
Where silence is a gaoler worse than theirs ?

ANN.

Mary, if I could help you——

MARY.

Why, then, help
Would still be in the world, and things that were
Might be as if they were not. There's no help.

ANN.

My dear, I've suffered for you, nights and nights,
Lying awake, when all the valley wind
Pours like a spring-tide on a groaning beach ;
I've waited for you to come back again,
The same that you were always ; and you come,
So broken and so weary ; and yet, now,
There's nothing I can do to help you, nothing.

MARY.

No, there is nothing.

ANN.

There are those that could
And will not. O those Christian consciences
That hoard up the poor sorrows of the world,
And call them sins ! I've little doubt you sat
From Helston here to Ruan in the coach
And not a soul that used to know you seemed
To know you now, or spoke to you.

MARY.

O, no !
But I was glad of that.

ANN.

Then these that came
Out of their cottages to see you come——

MARY.

They came to see me ?

ANN.

Ay, to see you come,
But not to say "God bless you," seeing you ;
Not to hold out a hand.

MARY.

They're not here now :
Father is here, and yet he is not here.
And I am tired : let me sit down and think.

[She sits down on the step of the coach and stares at the ground.]

ANN.

Don't think too much, Mary : it does no good.

MARY.

I learned to think the day my child was born,
And the day after, while they buried him.

ANN.

Well for you that he died !

MARY.

No, ill for me.
I should have come back humble, fit to live ;
I am proud and tired, and only fit to die.

ANN.

You were proud always ; but some weariness
Has broken down your pride.

MARY.

Ay, broken it,
So that it lives, and cries out with the pain.

ANN.

How did you live through all this misery ?

MARY.

First like a stone, then like a thinking thing,
That lives and weighs evil and good, and says
I have been blind, but justice is blind too,
If this is justice that has come on me.

ANN.

The law was merciful.

MARY.

The law ? I mean
The justice that made women and made men.

ANN.

What sort of justice ?

MARY.

That which gave a woman
A body to be loved, and gave a man
The power to love a woman ; and then gave
A man the power not to forget the woman
But only to forget love. Why, that justice.

ANN.

You had nothing to repent of ?

MARY.

All the past
Was like a thing worn out and put away,
Not to be thought of any more ; I seemed
To drift with present time as with a tide,
And there was no beginning and no end,
And when I thought, and tried to stop the tide
By thinking, I was clutching at a weed
That the tide carried ; and I hardly knew
If I were tide or seaweed or some dream
Of sea-birds gibbering at an ashen moon.
[MARY looks up slowly, and draws a deep breath.]

ANN.

Why do you breathe so deep ?

MARY [*Rising*].

I do not know.
I breathe the wind, and it awakens me,
And it is like a memory. What is it ?
I shall remember soon. I have not felt
The sea-salt and the heather-honey wind
Since—ah, since I was reaping in the field.

ANN.

It is the wind that comes across the downs,
It comes out of the sea beyond the downs,
An evil sea-wind.

MARY.

It is awakening me.
Do you know, Ann, that if you think a thing
And then forget it, and you go again

To where you had the thought, you find it there,
Waiting for you. I have come back again
Where all I did, not thought, was done ; and now
I find it all before me as it was,
Not as I saw it then, but as it was,
The truth of it, the truth of what I did.
All I have done I did because I must ;
I knew not why I did it : now I know.
I see myself, my father, and the man
I killed because I loved him——

ANN.

No, don't say
These idle words !

MARY.

I loved him, and I killed him
Because I loved him, and he had made my love
A thing impossible while he lived. There is
A hidden cruelty in love that turns
Only against the thing it loves the best.
I loved my lover and my father loves me ;
And that is why we kill each other : I
The body, he the soul.

ANN.

Stop, Mary !

MARY.

No.

I honour my father : let him honour me.
He never doubted he was in the right :
If he could but believe I was right too !

ANN.

How could that be, Mary ? He still cries out
Upon the sickle and upon his hands
Because they sharpened it, and calls his hands
Helpers of sin, and calls for punishment ;
So that there is a joy in him to have
His punishment in you under his roof.

MARY.

Now I know what he is and what I am.
He'll save his soul : I have to save my soul
That he would kill for love and righteousness.
And now I know that, though I have come back,
I never shall go back to him. Ann, Ann,
He judges harder than the law.

ANN.

He does ;
He judges by his Bible.

MARY.

That's not true !
The Bible ! " Judge not that ye be not judged ! "
I only know the Bible has said that.

ANN.

He judges as he thinks his Bible says.

MARY.

He judges for himself : so be it ! but I,
I have myself to judge by. There is some law,

It may be, shall set both to rights some day.
Only not now.

ANN.

There can't be two things true,
Mary ; you've done the thing you've done : God knows
You have suffered, and the law has pardoned you,
As God will : but you haven't got the right
To stand up as you stand and answer him.
Say, God forgive me, I was mad. He will.
But don't say : I was right.

MARY.

Shall I not say
Father was wrong, father has done me wrong ?
Has he not sold my happiness and his
For heavy, empty syllables that weigh
False in the balances ? There's sin, a name,
Justice, a name, repentance, right and wrong,
Names ; he would hold them in his hand, and stand
Like a proud, ignorant child clutching his toys,
In God's place, more inflexible than God.
Yet to himself, the idea of his soul,
He has been true, and I to my own soul.

ANN.

What are you saying, Mary ? He looks up,
And he is listening.

MARY.

I gave myself for love.
And I rejoice because I have known love.

It was for love, because I have known love,
I killed my lover, and because I was
A woman, and the mother of his child :
There also I have nothing to repent.
And always all my sorrow and this grief
Have come to me out of the terrible joy
That is the root of love ; ay, and because
I am a woman : there's no love that lacks
Such sorrow, nor no woman. If we sin,
The very earth sins with us, and our life
Cries against things that are.

ANN.

He has heard all,
And seems as if he'd speak.

MARY.

All's over now ;
I am alone ; there's nothing to be done,
Nowhere to go, no corner of the earth
To creep into ; only, I will be free,
Not accept any bondage, and not stoop
Under a roof that grudges me or set
My lips to any bread of penitence.

ANN.

God help you, Mary !

MARY.

Hush ! what was that ?
Do you not hear ! 'Tis Vecchan. My one friend !
[VECCHAN *is heard singing.*]

Dance with the moon in heaven !
Old winter was a-cold ;
But the young Spring is coming in
In purple and cloth of gold.
*[She runs in gaily, dressed more fantastically than
ever, goes up to MARY and kisses her.]*

VECCHAN.

Why have you loitered till the sun is burnt out,
And there's no more harvest, and the reaping is over ?
I have been waiting for you in the heat and the cold,
And I have been sad and merry, and the clock went on,
And you have never come to me : do you not love me
any longer ?

Have you come to me now ? I have been waiting
because I love you ;
But it is time now : will you not come home with me ?
Come away, come away now.

MARY.

Do you not see,
Ann, she has come because I wanted her ?
I did not know, but she and the winds knew.
And she has come to me with all her flowers ;
There's heather here ; give me the heather, Vecchan.
It smells of salt and honey, the old smell.
Nothing is changed here ; all the world but I
Seems to stand still, and I come back to it.
You're still my friend, Vecchan ! and is there still
The downs and the mud cottage on the downs,
The same still, Vecchan ?

VECCHAN.

The witch-lady in heaven
Told me that you were coming, and all is ready.
Why have you been so long? You have been so long
That the moths have eaten windows in the silk
And you can see the brightness of the walls
That are of gold and silver and precious stones.
But that we will say is the court fashion. Come with
me :
Come with me, Mary, my father is a King.

MARY.

Do you hear, Ann? All that she says is truth,
Nothing but truth : she makes the yellow gorse
Pure gold with loving it : why should not I
Who have seen through so many lean old lies
Believe no wisdom and no foolishness
Outside her happy folly?

VECCHAN.

Then you will come?

MARY.

Yes, I will come.

ANN.

Stop, Mary. Think again.
Here stands your father : he will take you in.
And here stands Vecchan : this kind innocent
Begs hardly more than bread for her own mouth.
You will be homeless, houseless, penniless,
Alone.

RY.

No, not alone : I shall be free ;
As Vecchan is.

VECCHAN.

Then you will come, you'll come ?

MARY.

Yes, I will come.

*[She turns slowly to her father and goes a few steps
towards him.]*

But you, you have to know
That I, who stand here homeless, have yet done
No evil, but things evil have been done,
And I must bear them. I have found out at last
What life is, and it is not what you said ;
And what I am, I made myself, not you ;
And though you, you, have broken up my life,
I can escape you : I have found a way :
There is a door, and Vecchan opens it.
You are an old man sitting by the wall,
And it is you would tie me by the hand
And call it pity, and tie me by the foot
And call it justice, and you would give me bread,
And let me hate the bread, and call the bread
Kindness ; and you would let me slowly die
Of justice, pity, kindness ; and sit there
Crumbling away silently like the wall.
You are an old man, and you have done me wrong,
But I am young still, and I will work and live.
You were my father. I have a sister now :
Vecchan shall be my sister. Come, there's wind
Upon the downs ; and she knows all the winds

As well as any seagull. We'll begone
Out of the midst of you that bolt your doors
And shutter out the night. We will go home.

[She takes VECCHAN's hand, and they go out together.

ANN stands looking stupidly from MARY to MICHAEL.

MICHAEL rises, totters a few steps towards MARY, and then falls on his knees, and raises his hands.]

MICHAEL.

Lord, Lord, if she were right, if she were right !

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

THE DEATH OF AGRIPPINA*
A Play in One Act.

THE PERSONS.

NERO.

BURRHUS.

SENECA.

ANICETUS.

AGRIPPINA.

POPPÆA.

ACERRONIA.

TRIBUNES, PRETORIANS, NOBLES, GIRLS, ATTENDANTS.

The action takes place in Nero's Villa at Baia.

A hall, with open colonnades at the back, looking down on the sea. On the right is a door, leading into the banqueting hall. NERO, AGRIPPINA, POPPÆA, ACERRONIA, ANICETUS, and ATTENDANTS have come out from the feast and have gone towards the colonnades. The ATTENDANT who comes last is seen to shut the door of the banqueting hall, shutting out the sound of voices and laughter. On the left is a closed door, leading to the road.

AGRIPPINA.

••

If this be my true son, and these words truth,
As I have doubted, and were wise to doubt
Till I have surer proof of them——

NERO.

Good mother,
If there be any proof I have not given,
If there be hid from you and known of me
Anything in Rome, anything in my heart,
Ask me, and I will answer ; but if not,
I pray you, do not doubt me.

AGRIPPINA.

It is true,
You have both done me honour as a son,
And honour as a king's mother ; you have heard me
When I have counselled you ; you have done well,
And I will be a better counsellor
Than these who feasted with you ; yet, my son,
You have been hard, unjust, unpitiful,

A king and not a son to me ; if I wrong you, .
I do not wrong you without cause.

NERO.

What cause

I gave you I am sorry for ; how often
Have we been hard, unjust, unpitiful,
To one another : am I not your son
And are you not my mother, and is not
The blood of Cæsar and Domitius proud
And angry blood ? We are not easily friends,
Being son and mother.

AGRIPPINA.

If there is in you

Anything of your father, but I think

I bred you mine, ay, to the bone and marrow,
I have much cause to doubt you ; but, my son,
It were so strange, new, and unhop'd a joy
To let my heart go out to you without fear,
That I am drawn, and scarcely can withhold
The mother from my arms.

[She holds out her arms to him.]

NERO.

May I not kiss

The hands that were my cradle ? They are fine,
They are smooth yet ; may I not kiss the breast
I drank in life from ? Kings have been your lovers,
And are you not my mother ?

AGRIPPINA.

I am content

That I have seen this day ; now let me go,
My son, my king. Listen ! A joyous music.
[*The sound of music is heard from the shore below.*]

NERO.
'Tis the feast, mother.

AGRIPPINA.
Whose ?

NERO.
Athena's.

AGRIPPINA.
Ah !
Now I can hear the voices, and a song :
"Goddess of mercy" : that is not her office ;
What are they singing ?

ACERRONIA.
It is of Orestes,
Because Athena freed him from his guilt
At Athens, when the Furies followed him.

AGRIPPINA.
They followed him because he killed his mother :
How could Athena free him from his guilt
Who could not from remembrance ? A wild song ;
It passes, with the flutes and tambourines.
Is the ship ready ?

NERO.
I will not let you go.

There was a thing I have not told you of.
You shall not go to-night.

AGRIPPINA.

What is the hour ?

POPPÆA.

It is past midnight.

NERO.

You shall not go to-night.

ANICETUS.

Madam, the ship is ready.

POPPÆA.

The queen is tired,
And waits on sleep ; we wait not on her pleasure
Who keep her from her bed.

NERO.

Do not go yet.

AGRIPPINA [*To POPPÆA*].

I thank you ; you are carefuller for me
Than I for my own self. But I am tired ;
I am tired, Nero, truly, and with this new
Labour of happiness, and I must rest.
To-night I sleep at Bauli ; I shall sleep sound.
You'll send me in your ship ? I'll go in it ;
Come. Yet, one word with you before I go.

[*They go aside.*]

POPPÆA.

Why did you swear that there would be a wind ?
There is no wind.

ANICETUS.

Madam, there is no wind ;
But if you drop a stone into the sea,
The stone must sink.

POPPÆA.

You will fail, Anicetus ;
This innocent sea will never cover up
A deed so naked.

ANICETUS.

If I fail in it
Let my own shipwreck drown me.
[NERO and AGRIPPINA return, talking earnestly.]

AGRIPPINA.

I will send
Messengers to Octavia ; that you heed
My will in this contents me ; for myself
What is there I should ask ?

NERO.

What should you ask,
Seeing that I live in you, and am a king
Because I am your son ?

AGRIPPINA.

And now farewell.

POPPÆA.
Farewell.

AGRIPPINA.
Kiss me, my son.

NERO.
If I should kiss you
Again, you'd say I am not honest with you,
Or that I feign to love you ; and yet, mother,
I'll kiss you for good night.

AGRIPPINA.
Come, Acerronia.

[As ANICETUS points the way, and AGRIPPINA, followed by ACERRONIA and others, begins to move down the steps towards the sea, the music that had been heard before returns ; and at the same moment the door of the banqueting-hall is burst open, and a troop of young nobles and women hurries out crying "Nero."]

FIRST NOBLE.
Where's Nero ?

SECOND NOBLE.
The last cup of wine was sour.

FIRST GIRL.
Where's Nero ? All my violets were alive
When Nero sat among us like the sun.
Now they are dead.

SECOND GIRL.

The savour went with him
Out of the courteous spices drunk with fire.

FIRST NOBLE.

Come back, Nero !

SECOND NOBLE.

He does not hear us. Come,
There's music by the sea ; the singing girls
Are dancing with white feet upon the sand.

FIRST NOBLE.

The Queen-Mother is going to her ship ;
Let's follow, and she'll think we honour her.
Come.

FIRST GIRL.

Is she really the Queen-Mother now ?
Why does the King stand looking after her
As if he did not see her, and as if
He could see nothing else ?

THIRD GIRL.

Come, to the sea.

[They follow AGRIPPINA down the steps in a crowd, looking curiously at NERO, who stands with POPPÆA not speaking or seeing them. Some remain on the stage, and turn back towards the banqueting-hall.]

THIRD NOBLE.

Why did we leave the feast ?

FOURTH NOBLE.

I followed you.

THIRD NOBLE.

I was a fool to follow those young men.
First they cried out for Nero ; then they went
With Agrippina, who is going home ;
And now they follow after singing-girls.
Why did we leave the feast ?

FOURTH NOBLE.

We'd best go back ;
I left a cup half-filled.

THIRD NOBLE.

We are not so young
As those young men, and that's a sorry thing ;
But we are wiser ; wisdom ripens slowly
At the bottom of a jar : don't shake the jar ;
Wait, and it ripens.

FOURTH NOBLE.

Let's go back and drink
Your wisdom in old wine.

THIRD NOBLE.

I will go back.

[They go back and shut the door behind them.]

POPPÆA.

All's well, Nero, and now let all be done
Better than well. Can you act innocence ?

NERO.

I can act anything : what would you have me act ?

POPPÆA.

First you must clear your eyelids of this weight,
Go back into the feast, call for more wine,
Call for flowers, call for music ; and, being there,
Not dream, and not remember. Will you do this ?

NERO.

Poppæa, I will do it. I am now
Like the poor actor who must play his part
While his own roof-tree's burning.

POPPÆA.

This night's applause,
If you should win it, crowns you the best actor
Upon the stage of the world.

NERO.

I will not fail ;
It is a heavy and a weary part,
But I will play it.

POPPÆA.

Go, and I will wait
Till Anicetus comes to bring me word
That all is well.

[NERO goes in. POPPÆA is left alone. She looks
towards the sea, and seems to listen. After a pause
ANICETUS comes up the steps from the sea.]

Is all well, Anicetus ?

ANICETUS.

The Queen's aboard ; my rowers bend their backs,
Thinking they row to Bauli. When the ship
Touches the middle current of the bay
The timbers open under them and the sea
Pulls at their feet and drags the whole ship down.

POPPÆA.

The Queen is a strong swimmer.

ANICETUS.

When the ship
Opens, a beam above the cabin roof
Drops under with a weight of lead ; and he
Who falls into the water alive shall die
Of old age and not drowning.

POPPÆA.

For your service
Nero shall give you gold ; for every fear
You strangle in deep water, gold and honour ;
You shall have gold of me for every hope
You bring to ripeness, if my enemy's eyes
See not the sun to-morrow.

ANICETUS.

Though I serve
Nero in all things, in this thing I serve
One Anicetus, whom I answer for.

POPPÆA.

What has she done against you ?

ANICETUS.

But for her,
Seneca had not stepped into my shoes
These ten years since, and thrust me out of office.
I have forgotten nothing.

POPPÆA.

This is well ;
So many hates must hang about her neck
Heavier than your lead. Look out to sea ;
Which is the light of the Queen's ship ?

ANICETUS.

The light
Which flickers highest.

POPPÆA.

That ? It seems to hang
Like a high cresset smoking from a roof.
Was that a cry ? And now the light's gone out.
Go, Anicetus, bring me word.

[ANICETUS goes hurriedly down the steps, and POPPÆA remains gazing anxiously into the dark. The door of the banqueting-hall opens, and NERO comes slowly across towards POPPÆA, who comes forward to meet him.]

NERO.

Poppæa,
I feel a pity creeping through my blood,
Straight to the heart ; I shall weep, Poppæa, tears
Of perfect pity.

POPPÆA.

I did not think your heart
So easily moved.

NERO.

Nor I, Poppæa. See,
I am as tender-hearted as a child,
And weep to think on that which I have thought
Necessary to be done.

POPPÆA.

Most necessary.

NERO.

She was my mother : That I should speak of her
And say " She was ! " She practised on my peace,
Yet was my mother. She was my enemy,
Being my mother. What is there in a word
That comes again and stabs into my side
Memory like a knife ?

POPPÆA.

Be bold, be bold
After the event, as when your blood was warm
To accomplish it ; nothing is done till that
Cool and turn hard like iron.

NERO.

Is it a woman
Who gives me no man's counsel ? I would I could
Undo the deed.

POPPÆA.

You would not if you could.

Undo the deed. Go back into the feast.
Do you not dare go back, drink wine, sit still,
While I wait here, as I would wait, alone ?

NERO.

How long have I to wait, and hardly breathe ?
Do you not see, Poppæa, that the night
Waits, like an awful minister of death,
Silently, and the open eyes of heaven
Are watching to behold that thing which now
Is to be done under the sleepless moon ?

POPPÆA.

The night is like a day ; there is no wind,
The sea is white, and not a breathing ripple
Sighs over on the sand.

NERO.

If I should look
Upon the sea, one horror would be there,
Like this lean horror growing like a tree
Out of the rooted poison in my soul.

POPPÆA.

Think no such thoughts ; be merry ; drink this wine.

NERO.

Will it not taste of blood ? I cannot drink it ?

POPPÆA.

So sick already ? Would you if you could
Repent again ? You would not if you could

Call Anicetus back, undo the deed,
Unking yourself.

NERO.

I fear—more than the deed,
The undoing of it, yet I fear the deed.

POPPÆA.

This is some play you act in that obscure
Theatre of your soul ; act not too well :
The actor grows the part.

NERO.

If I should live
To be Orestes, driven about the world
By household furies ; if I should lose my sleep,
Hunger and thirst, and all that nature gives
To fill the vacancy of time, which else
Aches full with thinking ; if I should forget
All, but to-night, and this one endless night,
Night after night, making a night of day,
Recur, and be my lifetime ; if——

POPPÆA.

No more.

Let days to come write their own chronicle ;
But you, sleep and forget.

NERO.

Your hands are clean,
But I have done a deed at which the world
Shall wonder and turn pale ; I have gone beyond

The common bounds of evil : I have killed
My honour among men, given up my right
To the common warmth and shelter of the earth ;
And yet you bid me sleep !

POPPÆA.

You may sleep sound,
Now, and now first ; you have given sleep to Rome,
Because no woman stirs that civil strife
Which keeps men from their beds.

NERO.

It is for this,
And the gods know it, that I have done this thing ;
And I will pay the price. Give me the wine ;
I'll drink it.

POPPÆA.

Drink ; be strong.

NERO.

I am strong to bear
The utmost pang of nature.

*[As he drinks, a MESSENGER enters hurriedly from the
sea-steps, followed after a moment by ANICETUS.]*

MESSENGER.

My lord, my lord !

NERO.

What is this hasty villain ?

MESSENGER.

Most gracious lord !

NERO.

Speak then.

MESSENGER.

Your noble mother—

NERO [*Dropping the cup*].

Do not say it.

MESSENGER.

May I not speak good news ?

NERO.

Speak, and be dumb !

MESSENGER.

Your noble mother has escaped alive
Out of a perilous shipwreck, and she sends
To bid you have no fear for her ; she is well,
And means to seek her home.

ANICETUS [*Coming forward*].

'Tis true, my lord.

NERO.

My guard, Seneca, Burrhus, all of you,
Where's Burrhus ? bring him quickly ; Seneca,
It is a plot against me ; seize this man :

He comes to kill me.

[SENECA, BURRHUS, and guards have rushed in, and come forward while he speaks. NERO goes up to the man, clutches him, and stealthily drops a dagger between his feet.]

What is that ? a dagger,
See there, between his feet !

MESSENGER.

My lord, my lord,
I am innocent.

NERO.

Seize him, I say.

[The guards seize him and drag him away.]

MESSENGER.

My lord !

NERO.

Let him be silenced. Am I not safe from foes
Even in my palace ? who will be my friend ?

SENECA.

Cæsar has only friends.

BURRHUS.

What has he done ?

NERO.

I am undone, undone ; my mother lives
To seek my death ; this villain whom you saw *

Came for revenge ; she has a fear of me
That now will prove most deadly. She will say
I sought her death, she will outcry the winds
With clamour of her wrongs ; she will shake Rome
Though she were crushed beneath it. There remains
One thing, and one thing only. Which of you
Will speak the word, and do it ?

[*There is a silence.* BURRHUS and SENECA look at one
another, and glance aside at ANICETUS.]

Seneca ?

Burrhus ? Are both these traitors ? am I lost ?

SENECA.

Burrhus, you have the guards.

BURRHUS.

Not for this work.

Let him who planned it end it.

ANICETUS [*Coming forward*].

As I will.

NERO.

He gives me back my kingdom. Sirs, take note

It is a freedman, and no man of you,

Who makes me master here.

ANICETUS.

My lord, in this

I have your leave ?

NERO.

Hasten, good Anicetus,
Take what lies readiest to your hand, but go
Quickly, and bring me word—that's not enough—
Token, that all is well

ANICETUS.

When all is done,
I will bring token, Cæsar, that all's done.

[*He goes out, followed by his men.*]

BURRHUS [*Aside*].

Come, Seneca, here's nothing to be said,
Nothing to be done yet ; there's no room here
For you and me till all this deadly work
Is over ; then, if Nero calls for us,
We must come back again, and, if we can,
Save him.

SENECA [*Aside*].

We cannot save him.

NERO [*Crossing to them*].

Seneca,

You fed me with the chaff of words : speak now.
Burrrhus, you were my sword ; your hand is slack,
And trembles from the hilt. You, both of you,
Old, wise, unready, foolish, I have done
Justice myself, and, for my justicer,
No more than Anicetus. Get you gone
With all unfaithful servants. You have seen
This peril of my life and of my throne,

And have not lifted finger. Get you gone.
No, stay and answer me. You, Seneca.
Who have the craft of wisdom, speak.

SENECA.

My lord,
There is no good nor evil to the man
Who knows what good and evil are ; he knows
How to bring evil things to a ripe good.
If this thing be indeed, as it may be,
A justice more than justice, good shall come
Out of the evil in it, and survive.

NERO.

Words, words ; is this philosophy ? get you gone.

[SENECA goes out slowly.]

Burrhus shall answer me.

BURRHUS.

The people shall,
I fear, my lord.

NERO.

The people ? a beast whose maw
We cram with corn, whose gullet, like a sink,
Flows over with foul blood ; we give it corn,
Blood, iron bars, the whip, and hollow words :
It licks the hand that feeds it.

BURRHUS.

It has teeth.

NERO.

Go to the guard ; gather them : wait without.

BURRHUS.

I go, my lord. *[He goes slowly towards the door.]*

NERO.

Go quickly. *[To POPPÆA.]* Do you think
Anicetus will fail twice ?

POPPÆA.

My life on it,
He will not fail.

NERO.

But he must bring me proof :
I have not known a night that went so slow :
But he must bring me proof. If he should come
And say, I have done this, and lie to me,
And she should live to shame me ! She has craft
And an imperial pride : she will not die,
She'll not consent to die. The second time
She will come in, not answering a word,
And banish her accusers. It's not possible
That she'll accept of death from such a slave.
She will beat down the eyes of all his swords,
She will walk through the swords, and come to me
And smile her dreadful smile. She will come in——
*[A sound of feet is heard : he pauses, listens, clutches
hold of POPPÆA, and says in a terrified whisper.]*

She is coming !

*[ANICETUS and his men appear at the top of the steps
leading up from the sea, and the body of AGRIPPINA,*

covered from head to foot, is brought in on a litter. It is set down and NERO slowly goes up to it, uncovers the face, and gazes on it in silence. The door of the banqueting hall is thrown open, and the feasters come out, at first slowly, then more quickly.]

THIRD NOBLE.

Who has called us from the feast ?

SECOND NOBLE.

Someone is dead.

FOURTH NOBLE.

Who is it that is dead ?

FOURTH GIRL [*Behind*].

What is it ?

NERO [*In a low monotonous voice*].

She was very beautiful.

This is the first time that I dare look close,
And not be chidden. She is not angry now,
Nor sad, nor fond ; but she is beautiful.

Was it not necessary for her to die
That I should see her as she was, and know
How beautiful she was ? When we are dead
Men see us as we are, but, while we live,
As we would have them see us, I forget
If this dead woman were my enemy
Or I had cause to reverence her. Now
I reverence her dead.

THIRD NOBLE [*Asiae*].
Do you mark that?
He gazes on her in an ecstasy,
And dreams, not sees her.

FOURTH NOBLE [*Aside*].
Is he a man?

THIRD NOBLE [*Aside*].
Ah, no,
A poet, and afraid.

NERO.
Take up the body;
Come, we must burn this precious thing with fire,
And render it to the gods. Come.
*[The bearers raise the litter and carry it out slowly,
through the door on the left; NERO walks beside it with
his eyes on the face of AGRIPPINA, as if in a dream.
He is followed by POPPÆA, and by some of the feasters.]*

FOURTH NOBLE.
What is this?
Must we see this, and yet keep silence?

THIRD NOBLE.
Ay,
She that keeps silence now, beyond the door,
Talked once: she will not say another word.

FIRST GIRL.
Is this an honest death?

SECOND GIRL.

They say 'twas drowning.

FIRST GIRL.

There was blood upon the sheet that covered her.

FOURTH NOBLE.

How did she die ? There's surely some man honest
That knows and that can tell us how she died.

SIXTH NOBLE.

That can I tell, if you will bear with me
And suffer the whole truth.

FOURTH NOBLE.

Speak, tell us all.
You saw her die ?

SIXTH NOBLE.

Would I had seen it not.

The sea had cast her up upon the land,
And would not be her slayer ; and the land
Mocked her with hopes of safety ; for there came
The people flocking round her full of joy,
Crying her name, and crying on the gods
For pity and good help ; and she had come
From the sea's edge not many paces yet,
Because the people thronged her in their care,
When, suddenly, like a more deadly sea
The billow of Anicetus and his men
Broke on the people, and broke through, and chased
The succour and the joy ; and all fell back,

And fled hither ^{and} thither ; and she stood,
Fearless, and faint yet from the buffeting sea,
And spoke the name of Nero. At that name,
That name her death, "Strike" Anicetus cried,
"For Nero" ; and she, knowing her death sure,
Would not bow down her head, but, choosing it,
"Strike here !" she cried, and offering the womb
That had born Nero to the shameless swords
That did the will of Nero, she embraced
Death like a lover.

FIFTH NOBLE.

Can any man do this
And go unpunished ? Are there gods in heaven
Or men on earth that these things can be done
And we stand here and suffer them ?

SIXTH NOBLE.

Why, no less.
There is a splendour in the height of crime
That blinds the eyes of men, or turns the sight
To admiration.

FIFTH NOBLE.

How can this one man,
Who has wronged all men, live, and none of all
Whom he has wronged strike back one blow for Rome ?
It is not Cæsar's guards : one man who gives
His life for Cæsar's ends him ; and what Roman
Puts such a price upon his single life
Which he will stake in battle in one hour

Twenty times over, and for Cæsar, whoⁿ
He holds a tyrant ?

THIRD NOBLE.

It is not that he reigns
By divine right of lineage : equal right
Was Cæsar's and Britannicus'.

SIXTH NOBLE.

It is
A dizzy glory seated in this height
Of inaccessible evil. He shall reign
Till he destroy Rome utterly, and fall
Only with Rome.

FIFTH NOBLE.

May Nero——

SIXTH NOBLE.

Hush ! he comes.

[NERO returns, with POPPÆA, ANICETUS and the others
who have gone out with him. He stands still, and
looks around him.]

NERO.

Were we not at a feast ? You are all dumb.
Bring me a cup of wine. Why do you stand
As if you waited ? I say there's nothing now
To wait for any more.

SERVANT [*Offering a cup*].

My lord, the wine.

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NERO [*Not taking it*].

There have been many feasts that ended so ;
Fire is the end of all things ; and this fire
Burns out my heart.

SERVANT [*Again offering the cup*].
My lord.

NERO.

I did not call you.

The feast is ended : by your leave, my lords,
Or I shall weep before you : to your beds,
And think, not without pity, of the man
Now woofullest among you ; but no words,
As I am Cæsar, and can require of you
The solace of your silence. For to-night
Farewell.

POPPÆA.

Kind lords, and all best friends of mine,
The gods be with you in your going.

FIRST LORD.

Come,

If the gods go not with us, sure, we leave
No gods under this roof.

SECOND LORD.

We were wise to go

Before the feast turn evil. Who of us

Is too minute for this omniscient fear ?

[*All go out. NERO and POPPÆA are left alone.*]

POPPÆA.

This is well done, Nero, and greatly done,
Done like a Cæsar.

NERO.

Why, this had to be ;
Who is it says she might have lived ? No, no,
I have done a thing her life made necessary.
Did not her hands set me upon a throne
Too narrow to be shared, and high enough
To fall from mortality ? She would have thrust
The throne from under me.

POPPÆA.

Yet Octavia lives.
I dreamed that she was dead.

NERO.

Dream no such dreams.

POPPÆA.

I held her head with the long dripping hair
Thus, between both my palms ; with angry joy
I looked into her face, and she, unchanged,
Kept down her heavy, meek, and scornful lids.

NERO.

You had not dared——

POPPÆA.

I had not dared ?

NERO.
To look
Into the eyes beneath them.

POPPÆA.
Being dead ?

NERO.
Poppæa, the dead live : be sure of that.
Seneca knows not of it, but I know
What I have seen, and I have seen the dead.

POPPÆA.
I would that I could see them.

NERO.
What, the dead ?
These things must not be sought ; they come to us,
They are about us, and they look on us
Out of our shadows, out of a blind wall,
Call to us out of wind, out of the sea——
(*He pauses, listens.*) O, that was not the sea ! Did you
not hear ?

POPPÆA.
I heard nothing.

NERO.
Did you not hear ? Now, now,
She's crying, and yet I saw the fire take hold
Upon the flesh, and suck the hollow bones.
So many hours dead, and not quiet yet !

She'll wake me with her crying, night by night,
Come to my bedside, rather like a mother
Than like an angry ghost : she kisses me
Down even to the bottom of a dream.

POPPÆA.

That will be very well : she loves you still,
Or else the dead forget.

NERO.

If she forgot,
That were the best ; but she'll remember ; why,
Her kisses were all hoarded from my lips
To come again to plague me. Do you think
Some of the dead, that were not, as she was,
Immortally full of life, do these forget ?

POPPÆA.

Surely the dead forget.

NERO.

She will not, no,
She'll never let me sleep ; she will bring dreams.
If I should close my eyes, she would be there ;
And if I shut my ears, she would still speak.
Now the whole earth is full of her, the fire
Has not put out her spirit. There is a quick
And angry spirit more impalpable,
More like divinity, in this red wind
Than habits in the earth or in the air.
It can put out the torches of the night
That smoke about the moon ; but not her spirit.

She'll never die, and I must always live.
Where is this voice that calls me by my name,
Where ? where ? say that you hear it.

POPPÆA.

I hear nothing.

NERO [*Striking his forehead*].

Then it is here, within me ? I am changed,
I am inhabited. How shall I escape,
When I must flee away out of myself,
Because she is within me ?

[*He sits down and covers his face with his hands.
Then, without raising his head, he says—*]

Is it day yet ?

POPPÆA.

Be comforted ; the long, unfriendly night
Is over ; rise up and uncover your face.

NERO.

Who am I that I should look upon the day ?

[*The door on the left is thrown open, and BURRHUS,
with the Tribunes of the cohorts and the chief Pretorians,
appears on the threshold. NERO rises. They come
forward, some fall on their knees, and kiss the hands of
NERO.*]

BURRHUS.

Hail, Cæsar : these be friends ; they bring you thanks.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Perish all traitors ; praise to all the Gods,
For Cæsar has done justice.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Praise to the gods
That have saved Rome and Cæsar.

FIRST PRETORIAN.

Hail, all hail,
This justice has saved Rome ; praise to the gods.

SECOND PRETORIAN.

Cæsar, we bring you thanks.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

We bring you thanks.

NERO.

I am a king again. Pretorians,
Tribunes, friends faithful to me, I perceive
That this long night is over, which I count
The woofullest of my life. This thing now done,
Justice has done for me ; this shall bring peace,
This household woe shall bring peace to the world.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Praise be to Cæsar ; praise be to the gods.

NERO.

The just gods helping me, there now is nothing
I cannot hope for of my spirit, nothing

Left to the gods to thwart me with, I stand
Now at the height and pinnacle of my power,
Steadfastly immovable. I will strike all
The ages dumb with wonder. When men see
My golden forehead jostling the pale crowd
Of dim and inextinguishable stars,
They shall look up, and they shall say——

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Was this
A god or was this Cæsar ? ·

ALL.

It is a god.

NERO [*raising his hands solemnly*].

I will give thanks, a god unto the gods.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

• CLEOPATRA IN JUDÆA.

Cleopatra.

That Herod's head

I'll have : but how, when Antony is gone

Through whom I might command it ?

Antony and Cleopatra, iii. 3.

THE PERSONS.

HEROD, King of Judæa.

PHERORAS, his brother.

COSTOBARUS, his brother-in-law.

HYRCANUS, formerly High Priest.

PHANUEL, a Priest.

SOHEMUS, of Iturea.

MARDIAN, a Eunuch.

CLEOPATRA, Queen of Egypt.

IRAS,
CHARMION, } her women.

SCENE : *A hall in the Palace of King Herod in Jerusalem.*

HEROD *is seated with his counsellors* HYRCANUS,
PHERORAS, COSTOBARUS, PHANUEL, *and* SOHEMUS.

PHANUEL.

This queen, this concubine, this idolatress,
This white tenth plague of Egypt, brother's wife
And sister killer, this insatiate leech
And whore of all the Cæsars, this outspewed
• Unswallowable and deadly weed of God——

HEROD.

Peace ; do not prophesy against the queen.
My lords, this is the seventh day our guest,
Cleopatra, came to us from Antony ;
Seven days we have done her honour, and to-day
She will come here to take her leave of us.
The guards are ready and the litters wait.
Think well, my lords, counsel me : shall she go
With state, such as we owe our enemies,
And tribute, back to Egypt ? or shall she go
In the narrow balsamed litter of the dead,
Tribute to Antony ? Think well, my lords.

PHANUEL.

Cry out, the maledictions of the hills,
And dews of ague from the pools, cry out
Against this woman that shall make Israel sin.

HEROD.

We must have patience, Phanuel. My lords,
All hangs upon a moment, which, once past

Returns no more. Consider who she is
Whom now I hold, whom now I hold or loose.
She covets all Judæa, as a fog
Sucks up the watery lifeblood of the earth
She has sucked up the cities of the plain
From Egypt to Eleutherus, save Tyre
And Sidon, both free cities, and she seeks
The freedom of these cities. Syria
She has already, and Arabia
She hopes for ; and she comes from Antony
Gone against Artabazes, to subdue
Armenia, that he may give this woman
A kingdom for a bracelet on her wrist.
Do I not now already pay to her
Dues for Arabia, revenues for the groves
Of palm and balsam about Jericho ?
One morning, with her arm about his neck,
Antony leans for kisses : which the Queen
Sadly puts by : " You love me not," she sighs.
Whereat the fond fool, Antony, with oaths
By twenty several gods, clamours " A test !"
And takes it for a kiss. O Antony
Has kissed away the world, and now the queen
Sets politic bounds to appetite, and stints
Her choicest lusts, lest, for a bankrupt love,
He snatch at no more kingdoms. Counsel me
What I shall do with this wise enemy,
Now my most perilous guest ?

COSTOBARUS.

Wisdom, my lord,
Were here one thing with honour : let the King

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Send back the queen to Egypt ; being a queen
She must have royal usage.

HEROD.

What think you,
Hyrcanus ?

HYRCANUS.

O my son, stain not your hands
With any woman's blood : a woman's blood
Stains deeper than a man's, and hurts the soul.
This is a woman dear to Antony,
And you shall rather take the Nile from him
Than this mere toy of beauty. Men grown fond
Cling tighter to their toys than children do.

HEROD.

You are old and wise, Hyrcanus, yet I know
Why you would pleasure Antony. He slew
Antigonus, who cut off both your ears,
To thrust you from the Priesthood. Poor old man,
You have been High Priest, and for a little time
You have been a King, and now, at fourscore years,
Are you so grateful still to Antony
Who lent you his revenge ?

HYRCANUS.

Phraates the King
Of Parthia gave me room in Babylon.
In Babylon were many Jews, and all
Reverenced me as if I still had been
High Priest and King. But I did ill to leave

Babylon, where all men revered me?
Here even Herod mocks me.

[*He rises.*]

HEROD [*Putting him back in his seat*].

No, father,

I also reverence you, I set your place
Above the place of all men at the feast,
I do you honour before all men. Come,
Have patience with me. You have not spoken yet,
Pheroras; you are brother to me and share
My labours in the kingdom.

PHERORAS.

Herod, first

Be friends with Antony, and for his sake
Seem friend to Cleopatra.

HEROD.

But is she not

A poison in his bones to Antony?
Shall I not rid him of his mortal hurt
In ridding him of Cleopatra?

PHERORAS.

Brother,

Does not a man love better than all springs
Of living water in his neighbour's fields
The poison that is sweet to his own bones?

COSTOBARUS.

That you know best, Pheroras. Twice you have
spurned

Herod, and his two daughters you have spurned,
And for a handmaid. Truly you cleave close
To your own poison.

PHERORAS.

He who speaks to me
Speaks from a better knowledge. As a man
Puts by a woman, so your wife put by
Her husband, being the daughter of a King.
I would not for the Kings of the earth put by
My wife that was a handmaid.

HEROD.

Peace, no more.
Is it a time to speak of these things now,
Or of the thing now present? You are all
Wranglers among yourselves, each for his own
And no man for the kingdom. Shall I find
Counsel in you or put my trust in you?
For I would make an end now suddenly
Of Cleopatra, and in one stroke rid
Antony of his most unfaithful friend,
Who will one day when he has need of her,
Sell him for love or safety; and myself
Of this sly enemy, this running flame
That would lick up Judæa like a field
Of windy corn.

PHANUEL.

The fire of heaven lick up
The Nile and all its vermin; winds of drought
Suck dry the Egyptian cisterns; may the dust

Of all the desert be heaped over her,
Because of whom Israël shall surely sin.

SOHEMUS.
Phanuel speaks truth

HEROD.
How so?

SOHEMUS.
Beware of her.

HEROD.
Why, so I would.

SOHEMUS.
Let her not come to you ;
They say she cast a spell on Antony.

HEROD.
I have no fear of any woman's spell.

SOHEMUS.
That's not well said, my lord. Antony said
He would not fear a woman.

HEROD.
If she should die,
It were well for me and well for Antony.

SOHEMUS.
If she should die, what man is there of us
Shall say to Antony : "It is for your good
That this your leman, the chief woman now
At this time in the world, has suffered death

For Herod's pleasure?" Have a care, my lord ;
Send her alive out of the land : but look
Upon her face no more.

HEROD.

You have all spoken ;
You have said wisely ; yet is it my will
To follow out my will, whether it be
Wisdom or folly. This Egyptian plague
Has cumbered the sound earth too long. She is
The idol of the world's idolatry ;
No heathen can resist her, for she has
The witchcraft of their gods ; but as for me,
My trust is in the Lord God, he is the God
Of my own people, he is the Lord of Hosts.
I will rise up in the young strength of God
And smite this ancient evil, that has wrought
So much of all the evil of the world.

[*The doors are thrown open, and an ATTENDANT appears.*]

ATTENDANT.

The Queen of Egypt and the Queen of Queens,
Empress and daughter of the Ptolemies,
Regent of Isis, Cleopatra !

[*All rise. CLEOPATRA enters, attended by CHARMION, IRAS, MARDIAN, and the others. HEROD moves forward to receive her, but before he has reached her, PHANUEL comes forward with a pointing finger, and cries out at her.*]

PHANUEL.

See,
The leprosy of beauty, the white sin
Her idols are upon her, Ashtaroth
Points with the horns of the white poisonous moon
Upon her forehead, Baal is in her eyes.
Beware of the accursed beauty !

[CLEOPATRA gazes at him with a tranquil and mocking smile.]

CLEOPATRA.

Sir,
Mardian my eunuch shall attend on you.
Go, Mardian, comfort him ; speak to him kindly,
Mardian.
[PHANUEL rushes out past her with uplifted arms.
She turns to HEROD.]
Your counsellors are women, by these tears.

HEROD.

Pardon, immortal queen : this is a voice
Which cries some sacred madness like a bird,
Not knowing what it speaks. Think it no more
Than a grey handful of the dust which rose
Against you in the desert.

CLEOPATRA.

Why, so be it :
My eyes remember that, and my ears this.
These lords are courteous to me, by their looks.
Why do they stand apart ?

HEROD.

They do but wait
To give you homage.

CLEOPATRA [*To HYRCANUS*].

You may kiss my hand,
Old man. Ah, Costobarus, this is well.
I was your friend, and better than you thought.
Brother of Herod, also my good friend ;
And you, Sohemus, be it well with you.

[*They all salute her and go out.*]

Go, Iras, Charmion, go ; be not far off,
Take Mardian and the others, wait without.

[*Aside.*] And look you, Iras, if you find a friend,
Sound him of Herod's purpose. [*They all go out.*]

My kind lord,
I have been your guest ; I leave you ; this last time
We speak together ; be the lips of each
Naked as truth.

HEROD.

God be my witness, lady,
I have no guile within my heart or mouth.

CLEOPATRA.

Which of the gods, Herod ?

HEROD.

The Lord of Hosts.

CLEOPATRA.

We call him Mars : a serviceable oath ;
Antony swears by Bacchus, who, they say,

Repents in his own wine. He swears by him
That men may cry "The God!" They're very like;
There is an image somewhere, you would say,
'Tis Antony's big smile, and lips curled back,
And cheeks that pout and dimple to the eyes,
But still the eyes watch and the lips stand firm.

HEROD.

Antony chooses well.

CLEOPATRA.

 You smile, my lord?
Indeed, he feasts past reason. 'Tis a fault.

HEROD.

I thought of no such thing.

CLEOPATRA.

 'Tis very true.
I left him by Euphrates, all his mimes
Supping beside him : certain singing men
And certain dancing women. If Antony
Forgets to be a King, all's over. Hark,
There is a thing I have not told you yet :
I tire of him a little.

HEROD.

 This cannot be.

CLEOPATRA.

Why, not so much but I'd have Antony
Rather than Cæsar ; yet Octavius stands
To be the stronger ; but no matter.

HEROD.

Madam,
Antony loves you better than the world.

CLEOPATRA.

Is not that why I begged the world of him ?
He parcels me the world, scrap after scrap,
But slowly, slowly.

HEROD.

He has not promised you
Judæa yet ?

CLEOPATRA.

I swear I never thought
To ask it of him ; no, by Isis, no ;
I will not ask Judæa, on my life,
Of any man but Herod !

HEROD.

Yet even this
Antony gave me when I fled to Rome,
Scarcely escaped from Malchus.

CLEOPATRA.

On your way
You came to Alexandria, and you fled
Into a storm from Alexandria,
Because you feared the sea and Antony
Less than a woman.

HEROD.

Did I wisely ?

CLEOPATRA.

 If
I ask of you Judæa, have I then
Nothing to give ? You do not answer me.
Are you his servant ?

HEROD.

 Antony is my lord,
I am as faithful servant to him as
I hope for faithful servants.

CLEOPATRA.

 Antony
Is my lord also ; I have no other slave
So faithful to me as this Antony.
By Isis, I have whipped him from his throne
For having frowned upon me. You hold Antony
By serving Cleopatra.

HEROD.

 To his hurt ?

CLEOPATRA.

To his hurt chiefly. Octavia medicines him,
I serve him for his pleasure, not his good ;
And thus I keep him.

HEROD.

 Shall I also keep him,
Who am no woman, nor, as women are,
Naturally inconsistent, if I wrong
The trust that holds a man bound to a man ?

CLEOPATRA.

Listen, Herod. I am not, as you think,
The thing that cries and kisses, may be bought
For kisses and for honey in the words.
I am a woman : women are that thing,
But not a queen, and not a Ptolemy,
Herod ; and not, though all the world turned lover,
The woman Cleopatra. I have played
At kisses for the world ; not with the world
For kisses.

[*There is a pause. HEROD looks at her intently
without speaking.*]

Once you willed to be a King ;
You are a King now, Herod. Are you content ?
There is a fiery craft within your eyes
That marks you for a King of more than Jews.

HEROD.

So much suffices me.

CLEOPATRA.

If you would bend
So low as to allow a woman's aid !
Antony does, but Mariamne——

HEROD.

No,
Nothing of Mariamne !

CLEOPATRA.

How you cry
“Nothing of Mariamne !” Do my lips
Blacken her name, Mariamne, saying it ?

HEROD.

A small poor private matter of my own,
So please you, madam. Pray you, let it pass.

CLEOPATRA.

Because you love her ?

HEROD.

For so slight a cause !

CLEOPATRA.

Answer me, Herod. You, who are a King,
Prouder than any King, and in your land
You hold your wives as we our mistresses,
Are you so sure this woman whom you love
Loves you again and loves no other man ?

HEROD.

I could not be more sure.

CLEOPATRA.

Why, that's well said,
That's bravely said, said like a man ! That's said
As Antony might say it when he speaks
To praise Octavia.

HEROD.

Has Octavia, madam,
Done Antony more wrong than to be chaste,
A keeper of his children and her house ?

CLEOPATRA.

That's wrong enough : she does him hurt with it,
To make all Rome his hater.

HEROD.

I am content
To suffer so much hate.

CLEOPATRA.

She is his wife.

Antony tempts her not. I say, think twice
Before you trust a woman once. Think thrice
Before you trust a woman while the world
Holds Antony. No, let me speak. I say
That there is not a woman born of woman
He lusts not after, and not a woman born
That would not serve his pleasure for her own,
If I were not more instant and more strong
Than Antony to content Antony.

HEROD.

Then let me speak, if you will have it so.
I say there is one woman, and my wife,
Not to be tempted, not by Antony.
Not with all Rome. I have thought twice and thrice.

CLEOPATRA.

You say it.

HEROD.

Who should speak for me ?

CLEOPATRA.

Your pride :
Antony even now burns after her.

HEROD [*rising*].

He has not seen her face.

CLEOPATRA.

Why do you rise ?

HEROD.

You test my patience, not my loyalty.

CLEOPATRA.

With Antony, when women are the talk
A word suffices.

HEROD.

Words I do not fear.

CLEOPATRA.

Many have praised Mariamne.

HEROD.

They did well.

CLEOPATRA.

He doats upon her picture : is that well ?

HEROD.

Her picture ? he, her picture ?

CLEOPATRA.

Prays to it,
Bears it about with him, calls his friends to see,
Acquaints them with the name, who sent it him.

HEROD.

You lie, Cleopatra.

CLEOPATRA.

Do I lie, my lord ?

[She takes out the picture, unrolls it, and shows it to him.]

Do you deny the hand ?

HEROD *[Snatching it from her reads]*.

“To Antony
From Mariamne.”

CLEOPATRA.

Is it her hand or not ?

HEROD.

Where had you this ?

CLEOPATRA.

Of Antony sleeping.

HEROD *[Walking to and fro]*.

Why,

God of my fathers, why must Mariamne
Be now at Cæsaræa ? I would look
Into her eyes until I found the truth
Naked. I would set this name that does commit
Adultery with this name before her face,
As here they kiss together. I would shame
Her mother in her eyes. But I must wait,
But I must wait.

CLEOPATRA.

Some of her messengers
I gave to lions, some to snakes ; my beasts

Love dearly a man's flesh : they do my will
When a man's justice lingers.

HEROD [*Walking to and fro*].

Always now

The mother, with her rage against my throne ;
She threats me with her graveyard lineage, thrusts
Her withered ancientness between my sight
And Mariamne. And Mariamne hears
Her voice crying against me ; and now——

CLEOPATRA.

Now

She perils you with Antony, she plays
More than her honour ; it is with your life
She plays. But Herod, I will be your friend.

HEROD [*Holding out the picture*].

Do you not bring me bonds from Antony ?
Is not this picture for a sign of it,
These names for seals upon it ? You are wise,
You work to pleasure Antony : are we friends ?

CLEOPATRA.

Herod, I stand between your death and you ;
I am more your friend than you can think of me.
Let me but speak. Antony seeks your death
In seeking Mariamne : yet in her
Seeks but a moment's woman : while I live
Antony dares not leave me ; while I live
He never shall have Mariamne——

HEROD.

Ah !

Not while you live, Cleopatra ! It is true
How strangely we forget !

CLEOPATRA.

But that's not all :

Does not Mariamne long for Antony ?
We stand between them ; Herod, what shall we do
For one another ? I only am your friend,
Herod, in this ; if you will be my friend
In all things !

HEROD.

Surely I will be your friend ;
I had not thought to be so much your friend.

CLEOPATRA.

There have been kings have knelt to me for that
You would not for the taking. Here is my hand :
I would not that you kissed it.

HEROD.

The queen's hand
I kiss ; and so I seal myself your friend
In all things.

CLEOPATRA.

Why, that's well. Hark in your ear :
No man was ever yet a friend to me,
But I will be a friend to you as no man
Was ever yet my friend.

HEROD.

How shall that be ?

CLEOPATRA.

I have learned love in Egypt. All I know
I have not taught even to Antony ;
And I know all things. Have I not learned love
In Egypt ? there the wise old mud of the Nile
Breeds the dark sacred lotus, and the moon
Brims up its cup with wisdom ; I have learned
The seven charms of Isis, each a charm
To draw the stars out of the sky with love ;
The seven names of Apis, each a name
To stroke the madness out of cruel beasts ;
And I have looked into the heart of death
And death has told me all things, and I know
How to make every hour of life as great,
Terrible, and delicious, as the hour
When death tells all things. Can Mariamne love
As I can love, Herod ?

HEROD.

No, not as you
Can love, Cleopatra !

CLEOPATRA.

Kings have cast their crowns
Into the dust, and kings that are my foes
I can take up into my hand and cast
Into the dust, for love of me. I am a woman,
But I have power greater than any man's.

HEROD.

Though you have greater power than any man,
How should it profit me ?

CLEOPATRA.

 If you are a man,
Why do you ask ? Is there not heat enough
In these chill suns that would not warm our winter
To thaw the holy courses of your veins ?
How shall it profit ? how if it be but
That I shall take your foes into my hands,
And bind them with the girdles of my hair,
And set them blind and bound into your hands ?

HEROD.

Will you bind Antony for me ?

CLEOPATRA.

 My lord,
You gird at me with Antony. Men forget
The women whom they love ; but when I love
No man forgets me. When Mark Antony
Saw me the first time, I was a child at play
In Egypt, a young child ; the second time
I came to meet him into Asia,
A queen, and like a goddess. Thirteen years
Had made me and had unmade Antony,
But when he stepped between the silver oars
Into the music and the purple cloud,
His eyes remembered. Herod, since that day
He has not left me. He has a Roman wife,
A wedding-ring, and not a woman ; I,

I alone hold the man who holds the world ;
And Herod, I will give you Antony.

HEROD.

Why should you do a greater thing for me
Than you have done for Antony ?

CLEOPATRA.

Because

Herod shall be . . . greater than Antony !
Am I not Cleopatra ? are not you
King, yet a king whose neck takes on the yoke,
Antony sets upon it, and his brow
The sorer stain a woman's lightness sets
For Antony upon it ? Break the yoke,
Wipe out the stain, be lord of Antony,
And lord of Cleopatra !

HEROD.

For what price ?

CLEOPATRA.

Herod, when you have given me the world,
I will give you more than I gave Antony.

HEROD.

I am not rich enough to pay the price,
And the reward is greater than my hopes.

CLEOPATRA.

Greater shall the reward be than your hopes :
As great as your deserving.

HEROD.

Humbly, madam,
And gratefully, and in all things honourably,
I crave your leave to answer. As for me,
I am an Idumean, and here King
Over the Jews ; I owe to Antony
My kingdom, and my honour binds me his.
Also I am the husband of a queen,
Whom I hold fast from all men, as you hold
Antony from all women : in this thing
I take you for ally ; it profits you,
And I am profited by it : while you live
I know you never will loose Antony :
May the Queen live for ever ! As for me,
What I may do to honour you I will ;
What honour I shall do you presently
You shall not wait to hear. May the Queen live
For ever ; let there be between us two
Peace, and a long farewell.

CLEOPATRA.

My prudent Herod !
[*He goes out. CHARMION and MARDIAN enter.*]
Charmion, I add an altar to the God
Of Herod where the altars of my gods
Smoke not in Egypt.

CHARMION.

Madam, is all well ?

CLEOPATRA.

All's well enough, Charmion. [*She starts up.*]
But this dog,

This Herod swine and carrion of a Jew,
This puppet plucked by Antony, this King
Antony would unking for me, if I begged
At the right wine-warmed moment of the feast,
Or under some cool moon upon the Nile ;
This husband of a woman, whom he holds
As I hold asps in Alexandria,
For pretty, intimate deaths ! a biting thing,
Most cold and biting ! I have failed, Charmion,
And with this Jew !

CHARMION.

Lady !

CLEOPATRA.

When Antony
Made laws for Rome, and all the senators
Sat round him in the Forum, I do think
That, passing in my litter, I have seen
Antony rise and run to me.

CHARMION.

His seat
Is empty, madam, before an eye but his
So much as sees the litter !

CLEOPATRA.

Antony,
Antony's known, reckoned with ; let that be.
But you have known Cæsarion's father, speak,
Mardian, if you heard Cæsar answer No
To my most idle word ?

MARDIAN.

I have seen Cæsar
Kneel to you, madam, and not take your Yes
So easily as a Kingdom.

CHARMION.

They say, Madam,
The young Octavius, though his speech is stern,
Dreams but of Egypt.

CLEOPATRA.

I am worth a Cæsar,
Charmion ; the gods have made what they have made ;
We'll not dispraise them. This fierce woman here
Is not ill-mated : let him keep her close ;
That's well enough : she's not for Antony.

[IRAS rushes in.]

IRAS.

Madam, a plot, a plot !

CLEOPATRA.

What's this ?

IRAS.

Beware !
They plot your death.

CLEOPATRA.

Who ?

IRAS.

Herod.

CLEOPATRA [*With a slow smile*].

No, not Herod.

IRAS.

It is from Costobarus, and I wormed
Into his heart, and he is most your friend.

CLEOPATRA.

Well, what said he ?

IRAS.

He said, and not for nothing,
And secretly, that Herod seeks your life,
And means to kill you, and has ready now
A litter for your body, and a guard
To follow it to Egypt, for a gift,
Back to Antony, dead. O who shall save us ?
He said he had pleaded for you.

CLEOPATRA.

Now this is strange,
Wonderful, more than wonderful, most strange,
That not an hour, a little hour ago,
This may have been ? his eyes were cold to me
With thinking of me dead. And now the guard
Is ready, and the litter waits for me,
That is to take me living. I have done well ;
I have done wisely, wiser than I knew.

IRAS.

O madam, must we die ?

CHARMION.

What shall we do ?

CLEOPATRA.

Tremble not, foolish child, the fear is past,
My life is more to Herod than my death ;

I have saved myself ; Mariamne, whom I hate,
Has saved me ; and I have not wholly failed.
[*A knocking is heard at the door.*]

CHARMION.
Hark, what is that ?

IRAS.
They are coming.

MARDIAN [*Dropping on his knee*].
Spare my life !

CLEOPATRA.
They shall not harm you, Mardian ; courage, girls,
And bid them enter.
[*CHARMION opens the door, and an armed man is seen,
with other armed men behind him.*]

OFFICER.
In the name of the King,
To the most excellent queen ! To Cleopatra,
Herod ! The captains of the royal guard,
An hundred horsemen of the royal guard,
Captains with chosen spearmen, camels charged,
With five of the King's litters, wait the queen's
Most royal leisure to attend the queen
As far as Egypt.

CLEOPATRA.
The King honours me.
Even so will I one day honour the King.

